

The Great Divide

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[0 : 00] As you opened your Bible to Exodus chapter 8, verse 20 this morning, you should have been able! You should have been able to hear the faint ring of a boxing bell, because it's time for rounds four, five, and six in the greatest mismatch this world's ever seen. For those of you who weren't here last week, let me just quickly set the scene. We're in the middle of one of the Bible's biggest ever showdowns. In the red corner, we have the serpent king, Pharaoh, the great enemy of God's people, and likely the most powerful man on the planet at this time. You see, pride always does come before the fall, because he's picked a fight he's never going to win, because in the blue corner is the great I am, the Lord Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and he's come down to make a statement.

He's come to free his people. Because, you see, what got us here in the first place is that Pharaoh, the serpent king, enslaved God's people. He murdered their baby boys and ruled over them in cruelty, so God's come to set them free. And round one started with blood, a lot of blood. In one effortless blow, the Lord killed Egypt's beloved Nile. The fountain of life was quickly turned into a fountain of death.

Round two got pretty slimy, as the Lord covered the whole land with frogs. I mean, they were everywhere, and it was nasty, and Pharaoh's knees were wobbling. Then came round three, where gnats covered every man and beast. And at this point, even Pharaoh's own coroner were realizing they were completely outmatched. But you see, after every round, it just led to Pharaoh's heart getting harder and harder. The greatest mismatch is just three rounds in, and it's clear to everyone looking in that the serpent king that the serpent king is going to lose. Because it's been knockout after knockout, but he just won't accept it. But you see, there is more going on here than just some punches being thrown. A message is being proclaimed. You see, this whole mismatch has been put together by God so that, yes, he can free his people, but he doesn't need ten rounds to do that. I mean, it all could have been over before we even reached the canvas, but God has given us ten hits of his hammer to nail in this one point. The Lord is the one true God, and he's mighty to save. Because maybe you came in here this morning, and for the past while you've been thinking, you know what? If the Lord is the one true God, and if he really is the creator of everything, then I wish he'd just show up and do something unmistakable, something that showed to everyone he really is the only true God, then I'd listen.

Well, dear friend, he already has. That's what the ten plagues are all about. That's why the biggest mismatch took place because the ten plagues are God's megaphone declaring to you that he is the Lord, the one true God, the one true God who is mighty to save. You want proof? Look what he did to Egypt.

You want proof? Look what he did to Pharaoh. And it's important we keep that one main message in mind as we go on to look at the next three rounds, because it's the drumbeat that rings through every single one of these plagues. So instead of blood, frogs, and gnats this week, we've got flies, disease, and boils.

[4 : 56] And we're going to take a step back and look at these three plagues with a wider focus lens. Because a question I think is helpful for us to be asking as we look at these three plagues together is what's new about this next set of three. What makes them unique? Anything said that we haven't quite heard before in rounds one, two, and three? And the first thing that stands out is the distinction that the Lord makes. We see it first in plague four, and it's repeated again for us in plague five.

So look down with me to verses 20 to 21. It reads, 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, 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. It's the standard pattern, right? God calls for his people to be set free so that they might serve him.

And if Pharaoh doesn't, the threat's clear. He's going to get thousands of little flying, buzzing creatures for company. But look what comes straight after in verses 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.

[6 : 48] Here's something we didn't quite hear in the last three plagues, that the Lord is going to set apart the land of Goshen. The Lord is going to bring down judgment on the Egyptians while protecting and sparing his own people.

And look at verse 23. It puts it into sharper focus. Look at what it says. Thus, I will put a division between my people and your people.

There's a mine and yours, isn't there? Two very different groups of people. And what is it that separates them?

Well, it's very simply who they belong to. One group belonged to the Lord. The other belonged to the serpent king.

And once more, look down with me to the fifth plague, because it's repeated there again. Chapter 9, verses 3 to 4. Verse 4. Verse 4. The hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock there in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. Verse 4, but the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die. With one hand, the Lord is going to bring down disaster on the serpent king and his kingdom, and with the other, he is going to cover and preserve his people.

[8 : 31] You see, engraved into the very fabric of reality is this core truth that comes center stage here. There are only two groups that make up the whole of humanity.

You either belong to the serpent king or you belong to the Lord. I wonder what you make of that this morning.

This entire room, this entire city, nation, world, is made up of just two groups of people who await two very different experiences when judgment comes.

If you're not a Christian here this morning, then please hear this. The fence you think you're sitting on, it doesn't exist.

There's no neutral camp. There's only two sides, and if you don't belong to God's kingdom, you belong to the devils. Now, I know when I say that, instantly guards are going to go up.

[9 : 58] Because when you hear that, you probably start thinking, I'm saying you belong to some weird satanic cult who drink goat's blood and cast spells. That's not what I'm saying.

I'm saying, I'm just saying what the Bible says to be true. That before you're a Christian, you're dead in your trespasses and sins, chasing after the world and what it prioritizes, and following the devil in rebellion against God.

You see, following Satan isn't about drinking blood. It's about drinking lies.

Lies about God and who you are. Humanity's running away from God, and who's there leading the charge? It's him.

And just like in the garden, he's there under disguise. Eve just saw a talking snake giving some advice, but there he was, sissing forth his poison.

[11 : 12] God can't be trusted. He's a killjoy. Ignore his word and live for yourself. Trust me, you're better off without him. From the criminal to the nurse to the student, anyone living their life seeing no need of being rescued by God is a citizen of the serpent king, and who awaits facing a dreadful judgment with him.

But to those of us who do belong to the Lord here this morning, don't you need reminded of the distinction that really does exist between you and the non-believer, especially when it comes to God coming in judgment?

Because while God brings down judgment on Pharaoh, he is speaking words of comfort to his people. The flies and diseases were a terrifying prospect, but they weren't something that the Israelites had to worry about because God wasn't bringing it down on them.

While declaring to the world that he is the one true God, the Lord here in these two plagues is crying out to his people, I am the Lord, your God.

I'm the one who's going to protect you and shield you. The very arm I use to bring Egypt to its knees is the very arm I have wrapped around you.

[12:55] You see, the Israelites were to sleep soundly the night of the fourth and fifth plague because they could rest assured that the Lord had turned their land into a haven.

As long as they were in Goshen, they had nothing to fear. The Israelite boys and girls could sleep soundly. They didn't need to be sleeping under the covers.

No need for bad dreams about swarms of flies and animals dying because they were safe from all of that. Their God had promised them.

And brothers and sisters, if the Israelites were to sleep soundly the night before the fourth and fifth plague, how much more soundly can we rest in Christ?

It's true. We all await the final day when the Lord comes and brings final judgment on the serpent king and his kingdom, when the devil and all those that follow him face justice.

[14:01] And that day will be frightful. And that day will be devastating. But not for us. If you're a Christian here today, you have nothing to fear.

Because when the Lord promises to spare his people, that's exactly what he does. If you belong to the Lord, know he's for you.

He really is. Don't let secret dread fill your heart when you think of judgment coming on the last day. He's got your back and desires to do good to you.

You have nothing to fear. You're in Christ. You're safe and secure. So you really can rest easy.

You really can rest like you lived in Goshen. So, we've seen that the Lord is God who makes a distinction.

[15:11] But now it's time to see that the Lord is the God who's ultimately in control. And to really appreciate this, we first need to see the contrast by looking first to Pharaoh and then to the Lord.

So, how does Pharaoh react to all of this? Well, the first play comes just as the Lord had spoken. Look down with me to chapter 8, verse 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 swarms of flies.

I mean, imagine the scene. The sun is out. Pharaoh is enjoying some refreshing cucumber. When all of a sudden, a dark cloud starts to descend from the horizon.

I mean, it looks like a black sandstorm heading right for them. And it's accompanied by this dreadful buzzing. The buzzing just gets louder and louder as it approaches.

[16:18] And then within seconds, the whole land is filled with flies. I mean, they're in your face. They're under your feet. And everywhere you can see such a big impact do these tiny creatures have that it's said they ruined the land.

The great Egypt is brought to its knees by some flies. Pretty humbling, right? Look at Pharaoh's reaction.

He still thinks he's the one in control. I mean, it's mental. His land's just been ruined by some flies, but he still thinks he's in a position to barter.

Verse 25. Okay, Moses. I hear you. You can sacrifice to the Lord, but on my terms. It has to be done within the land.

Verse 26, 27. That's not going to work, Pharaoh, because the sacrifices we make, your people hate, so they'll kill us if we do that. And also, the Lord said, the wilderness, not Egypt.

[17:33] We need to go a three-day journey. Verse 28. Okay, Moses. You can go to the wilderness, but again, on my terms.

You aren't to go too far. I don't like the sound of this whole three-day thing. And Moses, plead for me. Get your God to get rid of these flies.

Moses pleads with God. The flies are taken away. And what does Pharaoh do in response? He hardens his heart once again and refuses to let the people go.

Pharaoh's clinging onto his delusion of power, and he doesn't care one bit for his people or land. Let it all crumble as long as I maintain control.

That's his attitude. It's pure, selfish pride. I mean, even in the fifth plague, when Egypt's livestock is decimated by disease, he sends someone to Goshen to see how the Israelite cattle is doing.

[18 : 49] I mean, let's see if the Lord really did spare his people, and what does he find? Chapter 9, verse 7, behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead.

I mean, undeniable truth that the Lord really is God. I mean, you want writing in the sky, here it is, and what does he do? End of chapter 9, verse 7, he did not let the people go.

He clings to his illusion of control, not thinking twice of what he has to sacrifice. Pharaoh would feel right at home with all the evil dictators of world history, like Stalin and Hitler.

Ruin my people, ruin my land, but I'm not letting them go, because I'm still in control.

Now, with that in mind, look down with me to the sick plague. Verse 8, you'll learn no warning is to be given this time.

[20 : 06] Moses and Aaron are to just march straight in before Pharaoh and throw some soot from the kiln in the air, and as soon as they do, boils are going to break out amongst the Egyptians.

I mean, look at verse 11. They're so severe that the magicians could not even stand before Moses. The men we saw tap out in round three are humiliated before the one they used to so arrogantly oppose.

And how does it all end? Verse 12, what's unique about this sick plague? Well, that it ends with the words, but the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

Who's really in control? The Lord says, I am. I am Pharaoh.

You're simply just in the palm of my hand, and your heart is like a running stream that I turn wherever I please. Now, let's just hit pause here for just a second, because for a lot of people, this verse of God hardening Pharaoh's heart can be as hard to swallow as a piece of glass.

[21 : 40] Now, it shouldn't be. It doesn't have to be. Because when we read that verse, we start picturing poor Pharaoh who deep down just wants to turn to God and humble himself before him, but God just keeps stepping in and hijacking the poor guy.

We think it's as if Pharaoh is wanting to run towards God, and God just keeps stiff-arming him in the face. That's not what this verse is saying.

When God hardens Pharaoh's heart, he's saying to Pharaoh, Pharaoh, crack on. Crack on and do exactly what you want to do.

God isn't creating evil in Pharaoh's heart. God is just handing Pharaoh over to his already sinful desires. Pharaoh, go and do exactly what you want to do.

You want to ignore me? You want to oppose me? You want to keep refusing to let my people go? Crack on and do it.

[22 : 56] And I'm going to use your evil for good and use it to glorify my name. Now, that might throw up all sorts of questions for you.

And if it does, that's okay. Questions are great, so don't be afraid to ask them. Just grab Joe, Donald, or even myself after the service.

But before your mind starts wondering, just think with me of the original readers of Exodus for just a moment. Mr.

and Mrs. Israelite, reading this on the edge of the promised land, what would the hardening of Pharaoh's heart have done for them? Because as they looked up from Exodus chapter 9 and out towards what was ahead of them, what did they see?

Well, a land filled with Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perivites, Hivites, and Jebusites. A land filled with mighty enemies that they were going to have to face and fight.

[24 : 10] I mean, it was pretty daunting stuff. Lots of reasons for why they should look to turn back. Lots of reasons for why they should shy away from the fight.

But hearing of the Lord's ultimate power and control over their greatest enemy was the very reason why they could go forward. Why they could go and fight in the battles that the Lord had called them to with confidence in him, not themselves.

Hearing of the Lord hardening Pharaoh's heart, would it have left Mr. and Mrs. Israelite with some questions? I bet it would have.

But more importantly, it would have left them deeply encouraged. To know that even their greatest enemy is held in the Lord's hands and is under the Lord's control.

Everything that looked to oppose them is ultimately in the hands of their God. He's so much bigger than it all.

[25 : 28] Brothers and sisters, we should be left greatly encouraged to. Because our greatest enemies of sin, Satan, and death can just look and feel so powerful.

They project scary shadows on the wall of humanity. I mean, just turn on the news, and it all looks so hopeless. Wickedness running rife, world leaders at loggerheads, and the threat of death always living large.

I mean, it's scary stuff. But here, we are shown that everything that looks to oppose us is ultimately in the Lord's hands.

yes, Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, but one that is on a leash. Yes, sin is running rife in the world and wages war in our hearts, but it's under the Lord's ultimate restraint.

Threat of death is real, but its timing is God ordained. so if you're sitting here this morning and you feel like you're just in the thick of it, you're staring down the barrel of another week full of daunting battles, battles against the sin and wickedness out in the world or the sin and wickedness in your very own heart, be encouraged.

[27 : 10] the one who is for you is so much greater than the one who is against you. So have confidence and dependence.

Progress can be and will be made. Because I don't know about you, but if you're like me, particular sins can just loom so large and leave you feeling so hopeless.

It's just too powerful. I've failed again and again. What's the point of even trying at all? I'm not going to get any better. If that's you, like it's often me, take heart.

Remember the one who is for you compared to the one who is against you. It's never hopeless when the Almighty is by your side because nothing, nothing is too great for Him because nothing is out with His control.

You see, He's the Lord, the one true God who spares those that belong to Him and brings judgment down on those who don't.

[28 : 37] And yes, He's in control, even of His greatest enemies and your greatest foes. This is a God who says He is for us.

This is the one you belong to if you've come to Jesus Christ, so take heart. You're on the winning site. He's the one who walks with you into every Monday morning and fights for you.

But if you don't belong to Him this morning, then this is the Lord you oppose. So why stay on the losing site?

living in slavery and drinking in lies. Satan only wants to see you suffer and sin just wants to strip you bare.

Come to the one true God because one of His favorite things to do is take those who follow Satan and transform them into followers of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 55] That's why Jesus came. He came to liberate you. He came to crush the serpent's head and to plunder Satan's kingdom.

I mean, that's what we all were. Every single Christian in this room was once a subject of the serpent king that has now been rescued by Jesus and transformed into a child of God.

He can do the same for you. Just humble yourself before Him and cry to Him for rescue because He's the Lord, the one true God who really is mighty to save.

Let's close in prayer together. let's pray. Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you that you're so much bigger than it all, that you really do hold the whole world in your hands and that nothing is out with your control.

Would that deeply encourage us, Lord, I pray? Would it make everything that looks to oppose us shrink into perspective compared to you? Give us a renewed confidence and dependence upon you in all we have to face.

[31 : 31] Lord, I pray for anyone who does not yet belong to you this morning. Would you please open their eyes to see the reality of the situation that they are in?

There really are only two sides. that there really is no fence to sit on. Soften their heart, we pray, so they would run to you for rescue, transform them into followers of Jesus Christ.

And Lord, now, as we come to sing your praises once again, would you strengthen us to the truths we are about to sing, warm our hearts towards you once again, we ask.

In Jesus' name, Amen.