

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS –

PART TWO – THE PERSUASION OF THE PEOPLE

God's people faced a nightmare in Egypt, as they so often have faced terrible conditions throughout the world and throughout history since. They could look back on better times when the true God had been taken seriously, as we can. They were required to work long fruitless hours, as many societies now expect both parents to work without regard for the needs of their children. Babies were killed at birth, as great numbers are now aborted even before birth. Those that survived birth were drowned, as so many young people today seem to be drowning in a sea of alcohol, drugs and other destructive influences. More than anything the family's survival was threatened. What could God do?

As on so many other occasions in the Bible, God's answer was through one man whom He first prepared. This time it was Moses who first learned what he could do as a Prince in Egypt. Then he learned what he could not do as a shepherd in the wilderness. Finally he learned what God could do. Now he was ready and the Lord sent him back to Egypt with instructions to Pharaoh to let Israel go. He faced two challenges, to persuade Pharaoh to free the slaves, and to persuade the Israelites to follow him. At the end of chapter four by the simple process of passing on God's words and demonstrating God's power, the Israelites at least were persuaded, for the moment. On his way to confront Pharaoh, Moses faced a personal threat when the Lord met his son and 'sought to put him to death'. His son was saved by circumcision which long before God had taught Abraham was the outward sign of trusting Him in discarding our old life. The Israelites in Egypt had forgotten their promise to God and needed to be reminded. Just as Abraham had faced the death of his son in Genesis 22, now Moses had to learn the same lesson. Isaac was given back to Abraham and Gershom was returned to Moses. Both stories were foreshadowing how God would lose His Son at the cross but receive Him back in resurrection. As preachers of the gospel our message is not just for others but must begin in our own lives if we are to be taken seriously.(4:29-31)

Pharaoh was going to prove more difficult. The Bible describes the process like that of a potter working on a lump of clay which, if necessary, he re-works over and over again. With a skilled potter only one thing can prevent the pot eventually being shaped as he plans, hardening of the clay despite much water and firm hands.(Jer.18:2-4) God is the Potter, which is also the word 'Maker'. Paul in Romans 9:17-24 used Pharaoh as a warning of the terrible consequence of resisting the work of the Potter in our lives. First it would be Pharaoh who deliberately and repeatedly rejected God's message and hardened his heart against God.(Exod.7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35) Once he had gone beyond the point of no return God began to harden the rebellious lump of clay into the ugly, useless shape it had chosen, as a warning to the world.(Exod.9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 14:4, 8) Jeremiah had been instructed by God to use the same picture of judgement on the pot which continued to resist His purpose.(Jer.19:1-11) This illustration of the potter and the clay beautifully reconciles the age-old argument about predestination by God or the freewill of man. Shaping the pot is entirely the work of the potter but resisting his work is entirely the choice of the clay. God has good plans for salvation for everyone He creates while at the same time every creature has the right to resist. Clearly an eternal God knows how it will work out for each of us.

No-one ever had a better opportunity than Pharaoh to hear the word of God and see the power of God. He had no excuse. The plagues that Pharaoh had to witness were not random acts of natural disaster. Each one deliberately attacked one of Egypt's traditional gods, demonstrating how powerless and worthless they were. In chapter 7 when Moses' rod turned into a serpent and

back to a rod, the challenge was to the Snake God. When the River Nile became blood, it was the Nile God, which supposedly gave life to the farmers of Egypt, who was shown to be dead. In chapter 8, the Frog God was shown to be a curse not a blessing. Later in the same chapter, two insects revealed the uselessness of the Insect Gods. In chapter 9 the Life God was unable to protect the animals, the Health God to guard the people from boils, and the Sky God from the destructive effect of hail. In chapter 10 the locusts revealed the ineffectiveness of the Crop God, and the darkness of the Sun God. Finally in chapter 11 it was again the Life God who could not save the first born of the Egyptians from death. Systematically every false belief of the Egyptians was shown to be wrong. Meeting the God of the Bible still does this for us today.(Exod.5-11)

Pharaoh's response to God's word and power was to make concessions under pressure which were bargains, not true repentance. As soon as the pressure came off, his concessions were withdrawn and he returned to his original refusal, hardening a little further each time. His final surrender in 12:31,32 in which he told Moses to 'go and bless me too!' was an acknowledgement of defeat not of sin.

The Israelites on the other hand became progressively convinced that their God was greater than all the gods of Egypt. At first they thought trusting God was too hard because the opposition was too great.(Exod.5.6) In chapters 7-11 they were silent, wide-eyed spectators as the once mighty Egyptian gods were demolished one by one. Finally in chapter 12 they were ordered to commit themselves if they wanted to be part of God's plan to save them. The pictures of the lamb slain and the unleavened bread eaten were illustrations of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, to be received by faith. In chapter 13 they set out with just 7 days supply of food and a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night to guide them, as God has promised to teach us, and to be present with and in us as Christians. In chapter 14 their first steps towards trusting God brought them to an impossible situation with the Red Sea before them and the Egyptian army behind them. Believing the Lord step by step, they went down into death on the bottom of the Red Sea and up on the other side in resurrection.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

1. How were the plagues which followed a response to Pharaoh's challenge in 5:2, 'Who is the Lord?'. Why is this story an important clue to how we should present the gospel today? Why should we not be surprised when those we share Christ with make life hard for us?(chapter 5)
2. How can we help believers who struggle when times are tough to trust God fully? What help is there for would-be preachers who feel inadequate?(chapter 6)
3. What does it look like when people harden their hearts against God? Are they beyond reach of salvation?(Acts 9:1-18) How should we respond when we see this happening? How do people still turn to the local 'magicians' to justify their rejection of God?(chapter 7-11)
4. Compare the first Passover with what happens when we come to Christ. What happened at the time of the Passover in the New Testament?(chapter 12)
5. Compare the Israelites first steps out of Egypt with our first steps in the Christian life.(chapter 13)
6. How may we also face major attacks as we begin our Christian lives? In what way was the crossing of the Red Sea similar to baptism in the New Testament? How does this story show us the value of a public acknowledgement of our new faith in Christ?(chapter 14)