

THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Part 1

I like questions, don't you? Asking a good question has the potential of opening a whole new world of understanding. Someone has noted that no one really becomes a fool until he/she stops asking questions. Someone else observed, "Don't be afraid to ask dumb questions; they're easier to handle than dumb mistakes."

God, too, is into questions. Did you know that there are 3,294 questions in the Bible? The Old Testament has 2,272 questions while the New Testament contains some 1,022. If you are up to the challenge, try to find and answer each one of them. Any takers?

This morning, I want to begin a new three-part series of messages. Just to be honest, each sermon in this series will raise more than it's fair share of questions – hard questions.

- Many scholars have debated these matters down through the years,
- Thousands of other questions have sprung from them,
- It is entirely likely, that some of you have had questions about these issues as well.

Today, I want to share with you one on my favorite Bible stories. I want to talk to you about a battle of biblical proportions; a literal battle between gods, a clash of the titans. It is one of those confrontations where the last one standing not only wins, but in winning would prove Himself to be the One True and Living God. The story is of Moses and the ten plagues of Egypt.

This account raises such questions as:

- Why did God send the plagues in the first place? Truthfully, God, the almighty could have easily killed all the Egyptians in an instant. He could have hit them with paralysis, then all the Jews could have packed up and left with whatever, whenever.
- Why did He use those particular plagues? We have hailstones – big hailstones falling from the sky -- accompanied with rain, and thunder, as well as fierce lightning; we have darkness so dense that even "the gods could not see each other"; things happened to the Egyptians that did not happen to the Jews who might have lived right next door. Some really bizarre stuff. Why?
- The story notes again and again that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Again, why? Do you have the answers?

Immanuel Velikovsky in his book entitled *Worlds in Collision* argues that the whole Exodus story is true. He then offers a natural explanation as to why and how each of the plagues took place. He said that a comet came close to the earth and the dust from the comet turned the waters of Egypt red. He goes on to point out that it was also the pull of the comet's gravitational field that divided the Red Sea thus allowing the Children of Israel to cross over on dry land. Just to be honest, I don't put much faith in the book's answers. How about you?

JUST TO SET THE STAGE FOR YOU, I WANT US TO TAKE A LOOK AT PHARAOH THE MAN, AND THEN A BRIEF GLANCE AT THE ISSUE OF IDOLATRY. Both are critical to a proper understanding of what we will be talking about later on in this series.

FIRST, PHARAOH.

As you no doubt know, Pharaoh was the king of Egypt. However, that doesn't tell the whole story. The fellow was also looked upon and worshipped as a god. This is rather hard for us to grasp because our system of government does not lend itself to worship and adoration. Assassination, yes; worship, no.

Nonetheless, Pharaoh was considered to be the "son of the sun god" (Ra). As the divine son of Ra, Pharaoh was the earthly representative of the supreme god of the heavens.

Then, too, Egypt had a mighty army and was perhaps the most powerful nation on earth. Again, all of this was under Pharaoh's leadership. In fact, I can just imagine the dude getting up in the morning, looking in the mirror and saying, "you're the man!" He really was.

Now I want to talk about the genius of the Pharaohs. Nothing better typifies this than the Great Pyramid. Let me tell you a little bit about it.

- The Great Pyramid was built over 4,500 years ago of more than 2,000,000 blocks of stone with each one weighing somewhere between 2 and 60 tons. How did they move them? Lift them?
- The structure was thirty times larger than the Empire State Building; it's features are so large they can actually be seen from the Moon.
- It's base covers 13.6 acres (equal to seven midtown Manhattan city blocks), each side being greater than five acres in area.
- Only a solid stone mountain could endure the Pyramid's immense weight. And indeed, a flat solid granite mountain happens to be located just beneath the surface of the ground directly under the Pyramid.
- Each of the Pyramids four walls, when measured as a straight line, are 9,131 inches, for a total of 36,524 inches. At first glance, this number may not seem significant, but move the decimal point over and you get 365.24. Modern science has shown us that the exact length of the solar year is 365.24 days.
- The Pyramid is located at the exact center of the Earth's land mass. That is, its East-West axis corresponds to the longest land parallel across the Earth, passing through Africa, Asia, and America. Similarly, the longest land meridian on Earth, through Asia, Africa, Europe, and Antarctica, also passes right through the Pyramid. How did they know this to be the case, 2,500 years before Christ?
- The builders built the Great Pyramid so that it faces true North, South, East, and West.
- The average height of land above sea level (Miami being low and the Himalayas being high), as can be measured only by modern-day satellites and computers, happens to be 5,449 inches. That is the exact height of the Pyramid. Again, how did the builders know this – or was it merely a coincidence?
- It is therefore not surprising that the place is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

We know that a number of Pharaoh's served Egypt, and oversaw the building of the pyramids. However, no one is positive which of these pharaoh's Moses challenged. Exodus 1:8 (*The New Living Translation*) nonetheless says of this king, "**Then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done.**" Joseph, an Old Testament type of Jesus Christ, had been a savior to Egypt some 400 years earlier. His programs had helped preserve the nation during years of famine. Nevertheless, this Pharaoh chose to ignore all of this. In fact, history indicates that this man literally hated all persons associated with the earlier kings, especially the Hebrews.

Scripture pictures him as being a cruel, wicked, afflicting, ungrateful taskmaster! Notice these verses:

- Acts 7:18-19 (*The New Living Translation*), notes, "**But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. This king plotted against our people and forced parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.**"
- Exodus 1:11 tells us that this new king "**put slave masters over (the Israelites) to oppress them with forced labor....**" Verse 14 yet adds that he "**made their lives bitter with hard labor.... The Egyptians used them ruthlessly.**"

Hey, this guy was meaner than "a junkyard dog!" Again, sin, cruelty, deceit, pagan occult practices -- all marked his life! He was bad news!

It is also important to note this man's spiritual condition. Exodus 5:2 quotes him as saying, **"Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."** Pharaoh recognized no authority other than himself.

IDOLATRY

One of the main reasons for this account being in the Bible is to demonstrate – not just for the Jewish people but for all of humanity, for all of history -- that God alone controls all of nature, all of the physical world, and that there is nothing outside of His control.

The whole essence of idolatry is the belief that every force in nature has a god that controls it. In Egypt they worshipped the Nile god, the sun god, the cattle god, the fly god, the frog god, etc. The Ten Plagues were designed by God to illustrate His superiority over, and His attitude toward each of these Egyptian gods. Yes, His superiority over, and his attitude toward all of the gods of ancient mythology.

In other words, the great **"I AM"** not only wanted to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage during this crisis, He also wanted to **"bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt"** according to Exodus 12:12. He did this in part by making the Egyptian gods repulsive. The people literally became sick to death of them.

The Bible then records that at the end of the conflict, Numbers 33:3-4, **"The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the Lord had struck down among them; for the Lord had brought judgment on their gods."**

God set out to rain judgment on the Egyptian gods, and according to this passage, when it was all said and done, God had done exactly that. All of the false deities of Egypt were defenseless against the deeds and the words of the Omnipotent One.

LET'S NOW MOVE TO THE STORY OF THE TEN PLAGUES.

In the early 19th Century an ancient papyrus was found in Egypt. It was taken to the Leiden Museum in Holland and interpreted by A.H. Gardiner in 1909. The papyrus describes violent upheavals in Egypt, starvation, drought, escape of slaves (with the wealth of the Egyptians), and death through-out the land. The papyrus was written by an Egyptian and appears to be an eyewitness account of the effects of the Exodus plagues from the perspective of an average Egyptian.

THE FIRST PLAGUE -- THE WATER IS TURNED INTO BLOOD.

Please turn to Exodus 7:17-21. The chapter details how Moses was commanded to go and speak to Pharaoh. He was to meet the king as Pharaoh went down to the Nile River in the morning. Evidently, Pharaoh was going to the river in order to participate in some pagan act of worship.

"This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water."

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt--over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs'--and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars."

Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt."

(SHOW OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF THE RIVER RUNNING WITH BLOOD)

The first battle was on.

This plague struck the great Nile River. This is important. The Nile was considered a god by the Egyptians. Pharaoh claimed: **“The Nile is mine, and I made it for myself”** (Ezekiel 29:3). These people believed that it was the river which gave them their great power. Through the Plague of Blood, though, God communicated to the Egyptians: “Your Nile is Mine. I can do with it as I will” -- and He did!

The people saw the river as being the source of life and blessing. The annual flooding of the Nile brought nourishment to over 1,000 miles of Egyptian-dominated settlements. The Egyptians saw these floods as evidence that the gods of the Nile were pleased with them. The Nile River was supposedly protected by the fearsome ram-headed god, Khnum. Secondly, the Nile was "possessed" by the spirit of Hapi who was honored as the god who provided the abundant fertility of the land of Egypt.

The fish of the Nile were also considered sacred and were supposedly protected by two powerful goddesses: the goddess of the sky and the queen of heaven. However, these two goddesses were powerless to save the life of even one little perch!

Do you know what dead fish smells like? I understand that this is a true story. A fellow was denied a loan by his bank. Rather than get mad, he decided to get even. He rented a safe-deposit box, put three dead fish in it, locked it tight, and then left for vacation. Even the Lord noted that Egypt reeked with the stench of dead, rotting, fish! The smell was to serve as a testimony that the gods of Egypt had failed in this battle of the gods!

While the waters of the Nile were considered sacred, blood, on the other hand, was repulsive to the Egyptian people.

In all, by turning the Nile River into blood, no less than nine separate Egyptian deities were judged by the Lord and found to be inferior and under His authority.

Verse 22 notes though that the **“magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron....”** Through some strange mix of magic, Pharaoh’s sorcerers were also able to turn water into blood and therefore Pharaoh stiffened in his resolve not to obey the words of Moses and let the children of Israel go. As a result, the plague continued on for seven days.

THE SECOND PLAGUE WAS OF FROGS.

To the ancient Egyptians frogs were sacred animals and, ultimately, they were the children of the frog-goddess Heka -- a powerful goddess of fertility. Heka was supposed to help women and animals in childbirth and she also supposedly assisted in the original creation of mankind.

Exodus 8:1-7,13-14, **“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials.’”**

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the streams and canals and ponds, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’”

So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

And the Lord did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. They were piled into heaps, and the land reeked of them.”

Round two was now on!

When the annual flood waters along the Nile went down, the frogs increased. This was seen as a good omen to the Egyptians. However, how many of you know that one quickly can have too much of a good thing?

I once heard a joke that fits here. Someone once noted that somewhere on Earth a woman is having a baby every five seconds. Immediately the listener yelled, “Hey we have got to find that lady and stop her!”

So it is with this story. The goddess of fertility seemingly got a little carried away! Hey, when we think of frogs, don't we think of a happy little frog with a cute little face? **(SHOW OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY)** However, these cute little critters quite literally took over the place! **(SHOW OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY)**

The frog-goddess' babies so multiplied that one could not walk upon the ground or move within the house without squashing the divine little creatures beneath their feet. Listen to verses 3-4 from *The New Living Translation*), **“The Nile River will swarm with them. They will come up out of the river and into your houses, even into your bedrooms and onto your beds! Every home in Egypt will be filled with them. They will fill even your ovens and your kneading bowls. You and your people will be over-whelmed by frogs!”** The people could not eat, drink, go to the rest room, or even sleep without their little precious gods peering at them.

- These creatures were making frog sounds night and day.
- They were leaving little slimy droppings behind them as they hopped from place to place.
- They were in the cupboards and under the sheets.
- In short, I would say that they were getting on people's nerves!

I want you to notice now that the Bible doesn't say anything about the people killing the frogs. Why? It was a capital offence to kill a frog in Egypt! They simply died and stunk! The frog that symbolized life was left to be raked in heaps of rotting piles of death. The True and Living God made their little frog god die and stink! This had to be an awful embarrassment to the Egyptians.

Donald Jones in his book entitled *The Gods Who Walk Among Us* (an excellent book that I draw from repeatedly throughout this series) wrote: “Through the plague of the frogs, the mystical power of Heka was reduced to nothing more than a greasy pavement crushed to death beneath the feet of the sorrowful Egyptians.”

Exodus 8 goes on to note that the magicians were also able to counterfeit this miracle. However, I don't want you to miss the humor here. The magicians were only able to add frogs to frogs. They were not able to do away with even one of the loathsome creatures!

Can you imagine the king's anger when these people waved their wands and more and more frogs popped up? How were they able to duplicate this miracle, you ask? I do not think this is a hard question. I believe the Lord enabled them for that moment to be His instruments and to add to His plague.

In my opinion, round two went to the Lord.

AS I CLOSE OUT THIS MORNING'S MESSAGE, I want to remind you that several of these ten plagues are set to visit earth once again, including a number that we didn't get to today. The Bible

points out that during the Great Tribulation God will again come against paganism with boils, hailstones, locusts, darkness and even death.

If I didn't know the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior, I would certainly want to commit my life to Him right here; right now. The same as the Lord won the first battle of the gods, He will win the next one too. Ask yourself, would you be able to stand during the plagues of the Great Tribulation? Would you; could you? Why should you?

I can assure you, in any battle of gods or battle of wills, in the end the One True God will win!

THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Part 2

M. Dwight Nelson recently told a true story about the pastor of his church. He had a kitten that climbed up a tree in his backyard and then was afraid to come down. The pastor coaxed, offered warm milk, etc. The kitty would not come down. The tree was not sturdy enough to climb, so the pastor decided that if he tied a rope to his car and drove away so that the tree bent down, he could then reach up and get the kitten. He did all this, checking his progress in the car frequently, then figured if he went just a little bit further, the tree would be bent sufficiently for him to reach the kitten. But as he moved a little further forward, the rope broke. The tree went "boing!" and the kitten instantly sailed through the air -- out of sight.

The pastor felt terrible. He walked all over the neighborhood asking people if they'd seen a little kitten. No. Nobody had seen a stray kitten. So he prayed, "Lord, I just commit this kitten to Your keeping," and went on about his business.

A few days later he was at the grocery store, and met one of his church members. He happened to look into her shopping cart and was amazed to see cat food. Now this woman was a cat hater and everyone knew it, so he asked her, "Why are you buying cat food when you hate cats so much?" She replied, "You won't believe this," and told him how her little girl had been begging her for a cat, but she kept refusing. Then a few days before, the child had begged again, so the Mom finally told her little girl, "Well if God gives you a cat, I'll let you keep it." She told the pastor, "I watched my child go out in the yard, get on her knees, and ask God for a cat. And really, Pastor, you won't believe this, but I saw with my own eyes. A kitten suddenly came flying out of the blue sky, with its paws outspread, and landed right in front of her." Never underestimate the Power of God!

LET'S NOW MOVE TO THE TEN PLAGUES. We covered two of them in the first message:
THE FIRST PLAGUE -- WATER WAS TURNED INTO BLOOD.
THE SECOND PLAGUE WAS OF FROGS.

The first two rounds of the Battle of the Gods went to the One True God – Jehovah God!

NEXT COMES THE PLAGUE OF LICE

Just to be honest with you, I do not hear many people talking about lice today. Do you? Since we are generally speaking, rather quiet about these pesky creatures, I felt you might profit from a brief update on lice. **(SHOW OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF A LOUSE)**

One historian wrote: "Since ancient times, mankind has had one constant companion -- one neighbor he could always count on to be with him whenever and wherever he went: the louse. The human louse has so befriended us that he cannot live without us. When we are separated whether by distance, or death, or any other cause, he perishes quickly unless another host can be found. It is difficult for us to imagine how different the world must have been when everybody was crawling with bugs! It is only in the last century that mankind has not been largely covered with bugs."

Hans Zinsser wrote in his book entitled, *Rats, Lice and History*: "It was not so long ago, indeed, that the louse's prevalence extended to the highest orders of society, and was accepted as an inevitable part of existence -- like baptism, or the smallpox."

During the Russian revolution, there was an outbreak of typhus (transmitted by lice) so severe that Lenin remarked, "Either socialism will defeat the louse, or the louse will defeat socialism."

Robbie Burns, the patron poet of Scotland, even found the time to write an "Ode to a Louse." I want to again draw a true account from the book *Rats, Lice and History*: The story goes that in the days of the Aztecs before the advent of Cortez, a fellow was visiting Montezuma's palace. He was somewhat taken back "by a number of small bags. He imagined at first that they were filled with gold dust, but on opening one of them what was his astonishment to find it quite full of Lice!" He then asked... for an explanation. He was told that the Mexicans had such a sense of duty to pay tribute to their ruler that the poorest, if they possessed nothing else to offer, daily cleaned their bodies and saved the lice. And when they had enough to fill a bag, they laid it at the feet of their king." What devotion!

While here, young women of Northern Siberia have a strange custom. When they begin to feel love for a young man or when they are wanting to get serious in a relationship, they throw lice at their fellow. A sort of 'My louse is thy louse' ceremony.

Now that you are hopefully totally grossed out, I want to share with you the account of the third plague.

The story can be found in Exodus 8:16-19 (*New King James Version*). Let me read it to you: **“So the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.’ And they did so. For Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod and struck the dust of the earth, and it became lice on man and beast. All the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.”**

(The NIV calls this The Plague of Gnats, but in Judaism the accepted translation of the Hebrew is lice).

Psalm 105:31 also speaks of this plague for it says, **“He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and lice in all their territory.”**

Imagine, if you can, an infestation of lice that covers the land like dust. Matthew Henry, the commentator, notes that lice were “small despicable, inconsiderable animals, and yet, by their vast numbers, they rendered a painful plague to the Egyptians.” They swarmed on both the people as well as the animals. They attacked the skin, the nose, ears, and eyes, and thus they caused no small amount of irritation, and even death. With there being so many of them, there was no place to find relief. They were literally everywhere.

As with the other plagues, this one struck at the heart of all Egyptian worship, especially their priests. Egyptian priests were extremely scrupulous about hygiene and ritual cleansing. An infestation of lice would make them unable to worship their gods. Then the Bible also points out that the plague was also upon every beast; no sacrifices could be made to the gods of Egypt with lice-infested animals.

Unlike the earlier two plagues, this one came without warning, and for the first time, the magicians were unable to duplicate this with their magic. The Hebrew God was perhaps illustrating that He alone has the ability to create life out of the dust of the earth.

In verse 19, the magicians declare, **“This is the finger of God.”**

What do you think they meant by this statement? There are several possibilities:

- One, they could have been saying to Pharaoh, “Hey dude, this is nothing more than the work of a finger of the God of the Hebrews. Just wait until He reveals His arm or His mighty fist.”
- Then too, they could have been admitting that the plague couldn’t be copied because it truly was a work of the Lord.
- Or finally, they were admitting that there was a power greater than theirs, yet a power they did not honor or serve.

THE FORTH PLAGUE WAS OF FLIES

Exodus 8:22-24 notes, **“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where they are.**

“‘But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow.”

And the Lord did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh’s palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.”

Once again Moses confronts the king in the morning as he the king was on his way to the Nile. I would suspect that Pharaoh was going there to again engage in some pagan religious ceremony. As

commanded, Moses warned the king of another plague – a plague of flies -- if he did not set the Hebrew people go free.

Pharaoh refused the order. As a result, the land almost went buggy with bugs!

As you know, certain phrases stand out in Scripture. Such a phrase is found here in verse 24 – **“And the Lord did this.”** There is no mention of Aaron’s rod in relation to this plague. The Lord wanted Pharaoh and his court to know that this plague came from Him -- not by the rod of Aaron or any other external means. The power was the Lord’s and nothing else. He could send a plague with or without the rod. He could do what needed to be done with or without Aaron or even Moses. **“And the Lord did this.”**

Lets now look at the flies. Various translations let us know that this was “a grievous swarm of flies”, or a "heavy" infestation. In other words, these insects were both very numerous, and very trouble-some and distressing. In fact, the passage is careful to point out that they even invaded **“the house of Pharaoh, and into the houses of his servants, and into all the land of Egypt....”** Josephus, the noted early Jewish historian, wrote **“the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies....”** When you look at the context of the passage here, you can easily understand why flies would flourish, why the land would be “corrupted” by them. Remember the dead fish, the dead frogs, and the rotting vegetation? Then too, no doubt many people had died due to the plagues. Again, flies are dirty, disease carrying, contemptible creatures.

I don’t know about you, but I hate flies. One never knows what they had for breakfast when they join you for lunch.

How many of you know what I am talking about when I say anthrax? I would guess nearly all of you. The term has been in the news many times since the events of September 11. Anyway, anthrax is a deadly disease which is spread by – you guessed it -- flies.

While no one can be sure, many Bible experts believe that the fly that is mentioned here was the tsetse fly. **(SHOW OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF THE FLY)** There are 22 different species of tsetse flies, and they live only in Africa. These flies are slightly larger than a horsefly. They breed along rivers and streams. They are active during the day and feed exclusively on blood; in fact, a tsetse can drink twice its weight in blood at every meal. Unlike most biting flies where only the female feeds on blood, both male and female tsetse flies are blood suckers.

According to the book, *The Gods Who Walk Among Us*, while flies were generally disliked by the Egyptians, they were, nevertheless, revered as the servants of the Egyptian "lord of the flies." The Hebrews also had a name for the “lord of the flies.” Can anyone tell me that name? Baalzebub. Baalzebub was often depicted as being a giant and ugly fly.

Milton referred to Baalzebub in *Paradise Lost* as Satan's chief lieutenant, and, in the litanies of the witches' Sabbath, Baalzebub is ranked, together with Lucifer and Leviathan, as an equal member of the supreme trinity of evil.

While we can not be positive, it is highly possible that God Almighty choose to unleash an army of flies to mock the Egyptian lord of the flies. Then, too, the Lord could have used this opportunity to again make the Egyptians sick of one of their own deities.

As a result of this scourge, the king decided to let the people go and worship, only he said that they couldn’t go very far. At this Moses prayed and the flies left to the extent that not one single fly remained behind.

Exodus 8:32 then notes, **“But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.”** In the face of this great witness of God’s power, Pharaoh only made his heart harder. He was setting himself more and more against God and God’s people.

Oh, by the way, something new also happened with this infestation, God spared His own people from this plague. In short, God made a distinction between His chosen people and the people of Egypt.

THE FIFTH PLAGUE WAS ON THE LIVESTOCK.

Again Moses tells the king to release the people. He then adds in Exodus 9:2-4, **“If you refuse..., the hand of the LORD will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses and donkeys and camels and on your cattle and sheep and goats. But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.”**

Before I explain this plague, I want to point out two very important truths.

1. The plagues were becoming progressively worse -- from dead fish, now to dead cows, donkeys and sheep, until it eventually ends with dead sons.

Obviously, God could have hit them with the full force of His judgment right from the start. However, that is not His way. God is perfect in patience. He is willing to wait if waiting might result in the turning of a soul to Him. Think of the great flood of Noah’s day. It took literally years for Noah to build the ark and for the animals to be loaded into the boat. Then after the vessel was finished God waited yet another seven days before He closed the door to the ark and caused the rain to fall.

Why? 2 Peter 3:9-10 notes, **“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night....”** God oftentimes uses a step-by-step approach, a gradual turning up of the heat so as to draw a person or a people unto Himself. He woos, He draws, He waits... but not forever. Eventually, judgment comes.

This gradual escalation of the plagues gave the Egyptians an opportunity to mend their ways before the full measure of Divine punishment struck them.

2. Then, too, the story of the plagues demonstrates to one and all that God cannot be defied. As someone once noted, “Our arms are too short to box with God.”

Pharaoh obviously believed his own press releases. He had heard and told for so long that he was a god that he had come to believe it himself. The plagues though eventually led him to the conclusion that he was no match for the One True God of Israel.

I would dare say that there are people in this building today who are trying to match wits or strength with God. You may as well give up now, friend. You will not win. No way! Never! Pharaoh didn’t; you won’t! God will win every time! You can count on it!

The plague on the livestock was particularly bad. Again it zeroed in on their Egyptian gods and in particular, their chief god -- the Apis bull. The Apis bull was special in that it was supposedly born of a miraculous conception when, every twenty-five years, divine moonlight (or lightning) struck a cow and it conceived. The Apis bull was thus considered to be the incarnation of god on earth. During its life span the Apis was worshipped as both the son, and incarnation, of god.

When an Apis bull died, it was embalmed, and with pomp and ceremony befitting a king, buried in a magnificent coffin.

While other religions have worshipped cattle — most notably Hinduism and in India where the humped Zebu cow continues to be worshipped as the representative of Aditi, the ‘sinless cow’. Nowhere, though, was the deification of such animals more noteworthy than in Egypt. The ancient Egyptians considered all cattle to be sacred sources of generative power, and due to this the people worshipped these animals and offered incense to them.

Therefore, it is no wonder that this plague was especially difficult on the people of Egypt:

1. It devastated the protected livestock of the Egyptians including the vast herds of Pharaoh;
2. It illustrated God’s unlimited power when, miraculously, none of the Hebrew cattle died; in fact, not one animal that belonged to Israel even developed a runny nose! God wanted the people to see that He was moving against Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, not the Hebrew slaves.
3. It humiliated the one of the chief gods and exposed him as being helpless. A great number of cattle and other animals died as a result of this pestilence.

By the way, parts of the world today are wondering if they aren’t experiencing a plague on their livestock. Britain has been hit hard by Mad Cow Disease and as a result has destroyed nearly 5 million cows. Last year some 20,000 cows were being put to death every week due to the problem.

The disease has hit close to home here in Wisconsin. Eighteen deer killed in southwestern Wisconsin have tested positive for the same disease, and state officials now want to kill all the estimated 15,000 deer in a 361-square-mile area to prevent Mad Cow (Deer) Disease from spreading.

Plagues happen!

Back to Egypt. The Egyptians had made the Hebrews poor and so God took it upon Himself to bring great loss upon the Egyptians.

Again Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. Instead of turning toward God, he blamed God. Exodus 9:7 therefore declares, **“Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.”**

WELL, I HAD BETTER CLOSE. As I do so, let me point out that Exodus 7:17 declares, **“This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD....”** Then Exodus 8:22 adds, **“...so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land.”**

God was establishing His Lordship before the Egyptians.

- He was the Lord over the Nile.
- He was the Lord over the cattle.
- He was the lord over the land.
- He was the Lord over life.

He was the Lord! He is the Lord!

That is the meaning of the Battle of the Gods!

THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Part 3

Genesis 31:34, “**Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them....**”

In one of the best documented crimes in history, the Bible tells of when Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, stole her father Laban's idols.

Think about this for a moment:

- Do you not think it strange that one's gods could be stolen?
- If these were in fact gods, why couldn't they protect themselves from the hands of the thief?
- Couldn't they have resisted? Why didn't they cause the camel to fall down, for instance, and expose everything that was hidden in the saddlebags?
- Couldn't they have cried out or something? Maybe they could have said, “Hey Laban, you dummy, we're right here. Rachel is sitting on us. Get us out of here.”
- Really, how could you ever trust a god to protect you if that god couldn't even protect itself?

As followers of Jesus Christ, isn't it a delight to know that a thief can steal our goods, but not our God?

I want to share with you some quotes concerning idols:

- Someone once observed that man is quite insane. He wouldn't know how to create a maggot, and he creates gods by the dozens.
- George Bernard Shaw added, “The savage bows down to idols of woods and stone; the civilized man, to idols of flesh and blood.”
- Finally, Martin Luther noted, “Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God.”

Who is, what is your god?

This morning I want to continue on with my series of messages on The Battle of the Gods. This sermon will again deal with the conflict between the One True God and the false and pitiful gods of Egypt. We will cover once more the story of Moses and the Plagues of Egypt.

Thus far we have studied five of the ten plagues:

- The Plague Of The Water Turning Into Blood
- The Plague Of Frogs
- The Plague Of Lice
- The Plague Of Flies
- The Plague On The Livestock

Which one do you think was the worse?

THIS PROCESS CONTINUES WITH THE TWO PLAGUES THAT I SHALL COVER THIS MORNING.

I WANT TO NOW MOVE TO THE SIXTH PLAGUE – THE PLAGUE OF BOILS.

The account can be found in Exodus 9:8-11, **“Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land.’**

So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians.”

How many of you have you ever had a boil? I think you who have had one would have to agree that just one of those critters and you feel as if you have been hit with a plague. They hurt – bad! For those of you who have never had a boil, or do not know really what a boil is, let me take a minute or two and fill you in.

A medical dictionary describes a boil as an inflamed, pus-filled swelling on the skin, like a pimple only usually bigger. **(OHT OF BOIL ON A HAND)** Several things can cause them including not eating your broccoli or paying your tithes. (Not really.)

Who do you think of when you think of boils in the Bible? Job. Remember the brother who had all of the problems? When Satan wanted to inflict terrible excruciating pain, he hit Job with boils. Job 2:7 (*King James Version*) notes, **“So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.”** Can you possibly imagine what the brother had to be going through?

Some experts who have studied the accounts of the ten plagues believe that this plague was actually caused by an outbreak of skin anthrax. In fact, I want to share with you a portion of a news transcript off of CNN News:

- “Although it's surfacing anew as a terrorist weapon, the deadly anthrax disease has plagued the world for centuries, with reports of it dating back to biblical times.
- Anthrax is blamed for several devastating plagues that killed both humans and livestock.
- **1500 B.C.** -- Fifth Egyptian plague, affecting livestock, and the sixth, known as the plague of boils, symptomatic of anthrax
- **1600s** -- "Black Bane," thought to be anthrax, kills 60,000 cattle in Europe
- **1945** -- Anthrax outbreak in Iran kills 1 million sheep
- **1978-80** -- Human anthrax epidemic strikes Zimbabwe, infecting more than 6,000 and killing as many as 100

- **2001** -- A letter containing anthrax spores is mailed to NBC one week after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. It was the first of a number of incidents around the country. In Florida, a man dies after inhaling anthrax at the offices of American Media Inc.

Again, skin anthrax causes sores that are very similar to boils.

Now back to the account found in Exodus. The Bible points out that this plague came without warning. Moses simply took handfuls of soot from a furnace and tossed it into the air. As the soot came down, it filled the air over Egypt. When it touched either a man or a beast – the soot formed a boil.

The furnace spoken of here might very well have been a furnace that was used to burn the carcasses of the dead animals that had perished in the previous plague. The scattering of the ashes is important to the story. You see, this action was sometimes used as a magical or religious ritual in Egypt to bring an end to a pestilence. Moses knew these rituals. He could well have served as a priest when he lived in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh.

His tossing the soot into the air may have signaled the end of the cattle plague but it also invited in the beginning of another plague -- one that would afflict every Egyptian including even the magicians. (By the way, this is the last time that we hear of these fellows.)

Everyone alike was now feeling the pain. Once again, the magic and the gods of Egypt could not spare them the judgments of Almighty God. In fact, the boils simply demonstrated a further turning up of the heat.

Notice Exodus 9:12, **“But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said to Moses.”** Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? This is also the first time that the scriptures record **THAT GOD HARDENED** the heart of Pharaoh.

Up to this point, the man had hardened his own heart. The hardening of his heart now becomes a part of the judgment of God. The evil king had resisted and resisted to the point that now God Himself actually adds to the hardness of the heart. In the Old Testament, God often punished people by giving them over to their own evil devices. The king had chosen hardness and therefore, he got hardness!

LET'S NOW LOOK AT THE NEXT PLAGUE – THE PLAGUE OF HAIL-STONES

Exodus 9:13-17, **“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go.”**

OK, God is mean. God is unfair and cruel. Isn't that what some folks think when they read this passage? Perhaps some of you have felt the same way. How-ever, just to be honest, I don't see God that way at all. fact, I see patience and mercy written on every line of this story.

Here we have a willful king who is full of himself who has afflicted the people of God in nearly every way possible. Over and over again the Lord has told him to let the Hebrews go. Over and over the king has raised his fist to God and shouted no!

While the Lord points out that He could have wiped each and every one of them – Pharaoh included -- off of the face of the earth, He didn't. He continued to wait; to appeal. As I noted last week, **“the Lord**

is longsuffering, willing that none perish but that all come to repentance.” He still is patient; but His patience has its limits.

While here, I want you to notice that each of the plagues represented punishment for a particular wrong that the Egyptians did to the Hebrews:

- The Egyptians made them draw water -- and so their river was turned to blood;
- They made them load their freight -- and the frogs destroyed the freight;
- They had the Jews sweep the streets -- and the dust turned into lice;
- They beat the Israelites with the taskmaster's whip -- they in turn were tormented with lice and boils;
- The Egyptians made them cattle-herders, whereupon the pestilence killed the herds;
- They were forced to tend the vineyards and fields -- and the locusts consumed all that grew;
- The Egyptians sought to keep the Jews as prisoners -- and were themselves shackled by the thick darkness that fell upon Egypt;
- At the birth of Moses, the Egyptians tried to drown every Jewish baby in the Nile -- they were repaid by the death of their firstborn during the tenth plague.

The Bible declares that vengeance belongs to the Lord. He will repay. He can, He will, and He does.

By the way, our text points out that Moses met Pharaoh in the morning, once again. As with the previous episodes, I would dare say that the two of them met down by the Nile River. It seems as if the king would go there early each morning for some religious practice. It could even be that he was going there to pray to the Nile River god. Can you imagine his anger, his hatred when he looked up once again and saw Moses and Aaron walking toward him? Talk about ruining someone's day!

Back, now, to Exodus 9:18-26, **“Therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.”**

Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt--on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt.” When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields--both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.”

I remember a storm that passed near Willmar, Minnesota while I was pastoring there. It was by far the worse hail storm that I had ever seen in my life. A number of people within the church were dramatically affected. I remember going out to visit the area after the storm had passed. Marilyn and I were literally dumb struck at the devastation. What once had been healthy stocks of corn and soy beans now looked like nothing more than tiny toothpicks sticking out of the ground. Exterior walls had the paint stripped off of them just as if they had been hit with a sandblaster. It was indeed horrible. I saw grown men cry due to the storm.

Imagine with me now a storm like that – no worse than that -- hitting a whole nation. That is what happened with this plague. Notice the scope of this plague:

- All who were exposed to the storm – man and beast -- died.
- It was more destructive than any of the other calamities.

- Then, please remember, we are talking about Egypt here. Desert. The annual rainfall in Cairo is only one inch per year. Thunderstorms with hail would obviously be very rare in that part of the world. As a result, this plague must have been absolutely terrifying. Then, too, the hailstones were large enough to kill people. The Bible also points out that the storm was powerful enough to actually break trees in two.
- Again, the Scripture notes that there had never been such a violent storm in the whole of the history of the nation!

According to the book, *The Gods Who Walk Among Us*, the Egyptians believed that the goddess Nut (real name) was the Egyptian protectress of the sky and weather. She was depicted in Egyptian art as a woman arched over the earth, with the stars above her back and the earth beneath her belly. Each morning, according to myth, Nut elevated herself upon her fingers and toes and thereby provided an expanse between herself and earth. Sounds absolutely nutty to me; how about you?

However, Nut was simply nuts to think that she could withstand the power of YAHWEH. Nahum 1:3 (*King James Version*) declares that **“The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power... the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm....”**

Other passages likewise note that the storms are nothing more than weapons in the hands of God. Look with me at these slides of lightning and tornadoes. Now listen to these additional verses of Scripture” **(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY)**

- Zechariah 9:14 states, **“Then the Lord will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign Lord will sound the trumpet; He will march in the storms of the south....”**
- 2 Samuel 22:15 adds, **“He shot arrows and scattered the enemies, bolts of lightning and routed them.”**
- Psalm 144:6 also notes, **“Send forth lightning and scatter the enemies; shoot your arrows and rout them.”**

In this battle of the gods, the One True God actually used the storm as His weapon. Can you imagine having to go up one on one against a power that can call forth lightning, thunder, rain, hail and tornadoes? Whoa! We serve an awesome God!

The Bible therefore points out that when God moved against Egypt, Pharaoh and all of his gods and goddesses were powerless to do anything about it.

The Bible records another instance of God using hailstones to fight against an enemy. In fact, we can find three passages in Revelation where hail will be a part of God’s judgment during the time of the Great Tribulation. Listen to Revelation 16:21, **“From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.”**

I certainly would not want to be here on earth during that time, would you?

Having said that, I want to once again move from God’s wrath and judgment to the theme of His mercy.

- When the Lord sent the hail upon Egypt, He gave the king and his people 24 hours warning. Those who believed His Word were spared. Those who didn’t perished.
- Then, it is also important to notice that although the storm was bad, God nonetheless had not forgotten His promise to Noah. He did not destroy the earth again with a flood. No doubt, when the storm in Egypt ended, a brightly colored rainbow arched across the sky. God remembers His promises.
- Finally, the Hebrews were again spared. Of a truth, God’s people are not to face God’s wrath.

How did Pharaoh react? This time the king was truly frightened. He confessed that he had sinned. He acknowledged that God was right and that he and his people were wrong. He begged for mercy and promised to let the people go.

Exodus 9:33-35 then says, **“Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the LORD; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.”**

Many people confess sin, make vows, appear penitent under judgment, only to reveal their true selves when the storm passes. The depth of one’s real change is made manifest when the outward circumstances change. Pharaoh’s heart continued to be hard regardless! This time though, the Bible notes that his officials also had hardened their hearts. His sin had become contagious!

AS I WRAP THIS MESSAGE UP, I want to read Isaiah 42:13, **“The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.”**

On a number of occasions, the Bible speaks of the roar of the Lord. Have you ever heard the Lord roar? The Lord Shout? Although God can be soft spoken, occasionally he raises His voice. When those near Jesus heard the voice of God echo from heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration, they said it sounded like thunder. Has God ever spoken like thunder to you?

Today’s message spoke of the roar of the Lord. At the summons of each additional plague, the roar got a little louder. Why did He have to roar? Because Pharaoh and the people wouldn’t listen.

- Then too, He roared in the days of Noah.
- He roared when Israel was found to be worshipping a golden calf.
- He will roar, as I pointed out a moment ago, during the judgments of the Great Tribulation.

The song writer wrote:

SOFTLY AND TENDERLY Jesus is calling.
 Calling for you and for me;
 See, on the portals He’s waiting and watching,
 Watching for you and for me.

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading,
 Pleading for you and for me;
 Why should we linger and heed not His mercies,
 Mercies for you and for me?

Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing,
 passing from you and from me;
 Shadows are gathering, death’s night is coming.
 Coming for you and for me.
 O for the wonderful love He has promised,
 Promised for you and for me!
 Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon.
 Pardon for you and for me.

Come home, come home,
 Ye who are weary, come home;
 Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling.
 Calling, O sinner, come home’

Revelation 3:20 quotes Jesus saying, **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”**

Softly, tenderly Jesus calls; Jesus knocks. Answer the call. Answer before the tender voice turns to the roar of judgment.

THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Part 4

A few years ago billboards started springing up across the nation supposedly bearing messages from God. In case you have missed some of them, I want to share several of the messages with you. Again, each one is signed “God.”

1. Let's meet at my house Sunday before the game.
2. C'mon over and bring the kids.
3. What part of "Thou Shalt Not..." didn't you understand?
4. We need to talk.
5. That "Love Thy Neighbor" thing... I meant it.
6. I love you and you and you and you and....
7. Will the road you're on get you to my place?
8. Big bang theory, you've got to be kidding.
9. My way is the high-way.
10. Don't make me come down there.
11. Have you read my #1 best seller? There will be a test.
12. You think it's hot here?

Do you think that if God really wanted to communicate with us, He would use billboards?

In the book of Exodus we find that the Lord used a number of means to speak to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. He told them to let His people, the Hebrews, go. When they refused, then God resorted to a variety of plagues in an effort to get them to submit.

THUS FAR WE HAVE STUDIED SEVEN OF THE TEN PLAGUES:

- The Plague Of The Water Turning Into Blood
- The Plague Of Frogs
- The Plague Of Lice
- The Plague Of Flies
- The Plague On The Livestock
- The Plague Of Boils.
- The Plague Of Hail-Stones

I WANT TO NOW MOVE TO THE FINAL THREE PLAGUES

1. THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

Listen to Exodus 10:3-6, 12-15, **“Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail,**

including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians--something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.” Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh. And the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that locusts will swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail.”

So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the Lord made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail--everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt.” The locusts were one of the worst of the ten plagues.

The attacks of September 11 showed the people of America that this land is vulnerable. Who would have ever thought that “sane” human beings would turn airplanes filled with innocent people into guided missiles? The very thought was absurd, and yet that is exactly what happened. As a result of this new sense of vulnerability, the President of the United States formed a new office for his cabinet – the Office of Homeland Security. Tom Ridge presently fills that post.

In the time of Moses Egypt also felt vulnerable. No, not to some awful terrorist attack, but rather to famine and drought. Therefore, the second ranking officer in the land was the Director of Food Supply. If you know the book of Genesis, you will remember that the last twelve chapters of the book covers the story of Joseph. Joe saved Egypt during a great famine in his day. Listen to Genesis 41:41-43, “**So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, ‘Make way!’ Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.**” Obviously, taking care of the food was a big deal.

One of the things that the Egyptians feared most was a plague of locusts. The people were used to sandstorms, heat, and drought. However, they could never get use to or defend themselves against the mass hoards of locusts that would occasionally swarm over their land. Locusts were one of the most feared pestilences of the ancient world. They could wipe out a nation’s food supply in no time flat. **(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY -- LOCUST)**

Let me describe the spectacle for you. As you can see here, I have a transparency of a swarm of locusts. **(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY – LOCUST SWARM)** Such invasions could literally turn the sky black. A single swarm could contain up to 50 billion insects. Plagues often involve hundreds of swarms. In fact, there have been recorded instances where the locust would be so thick that when they rested on the ground at night, they would do so in layers 4 to 5 inches deep. When mashed, the smell would be next to unbearable.

Today, an average locust can consume its weight in food daily. A swarm can strip bare a whole field of grain in less than one hour. They will eat anything standing including plants and seedlings. They can actually cleanse an area of all living vegetation, whether food or not. In 1958, Ethiopia lost 167,000 tons of grain to these pests, enough to feed a million people for a year.

In Exodus 10, the locusts literally ate everything that had not been destroyed by the plague of hail. Then, too, the Bible says that the bugs filled the houses of the Pharaoh, his servants, and all of Egypt. Let me tell you this, you certainly wouldn’t want to sleep with your mouth open. Amen? As before, please understand that this plague was a direct assault on a particular Egyptian deity. In this case, the Egyptian god was Sobek—the crocodile-headed god of animals and insects. Sobek, it was believed, was the underworld demon of fire, earth, water, and air. It was believed that Sobek

controlled such elements to the extent that he restrained the activity of certain creatures within specific habitats -- the crocodile within water, a locust within air, etc.

The book, *The Gods Who Walk Among Us*, by Thomas Horn, points out that in order to pacify this demon, the Egyptians would offer it human sacrifices. In fact, it is highly possible that may have been the Pharaoh's intention when he commanded the midwives to throw the Hebrew children into the Nile at the time of Moses' birth. The offerings were meant to assure Sobek's favor in delivering the people from plagues or whatever.

In this battle, the Lord revealed that Sobek or any other pagan deity was powerless in the face of God's judgment. The locusts came when God ordered them in, and they didn't leave until God ordered them out. It was not until the Lord commanded "**a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea**" that the plague ended.

Still, Pharaoh's heart was unyielding. He would not let the Hebrews go.

2. NOW TO THE NINTH PLAGUE – DARKNESS

Exodus 10:21-23 says, "**Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt--darkness that can be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.**"

I WANT ALL OF THE LIGHTS HERE IN THE SANCTUARY TURNED OFF, PLEASE. Would you call this dark? Not really. We can still see. We can still walk around. We can still tell that others are seated around us. You can turn the lights back on now. Thank you.

Rarely do we get to experience total darkness. Even the night is not all that dark anymore. Street lights, car lights, and houselights all cast a glow into the night sky. Regardless of where we are, we can still usually make out some light somewhere. Then, too, we have the stars and the moon.

How many of you have ever been deep down in a cave when the tour guides turned off the lights? I have. Believe me when I say, that is dark. I could not see my own hand in front of my face. I will admit, it was creepy. I was uncomfortable.

The darkness that accompanied this plague was worse than the darkness that I experienced down in that cave. How could that be you ask? I knew that the lights in the cave would be turned back on in a matter of seconds. The Egyptians did not have that same confidence.

The darkness went on for three days or 72 hours! Then too, remember, these people did not have electricity or other means of artificial light. The people literally became prisoners of the darkness.

- They couldn't move about. The Egyptians, who had enslaved the Israelites, were hit with a plague that imprisoned them in their homes, preventing them from going anywhere.
- They couldn't see one another -- even their children and babies. They felt cut off and isolated.
- They went without food.
- They couldn't work or transact business.
- Someone has suggested that the darkness was so bad that it was oppressive. People felt as if they were going to smother. They felt closed in; claustrophobic.
- Don't ask me about their having to go to the restroom. I don't know.

Again, it was as dark as Egypt, in Egypt!

Matthew Henry's Commentary states, "The cloud of locusts, which had darkened the land, was nothing to this. It was a total darkness. We have reason to think, not only that the lights of heaven were clouded, but that all their fires and candles were put out...."

There is a little museum in Ismailia, Egypt, near the Suez Canal, The museum houses an ancient block of black granite – a shrine standing about 4 feet tall. The rock was discovered in 1860. The shrine is covered with hieroglyphics that describe a time of great trouble in Egypt. A time when the darkness was so thick that “the gods could not see one another.”

Like the Nile River and the bull, the sun was a major god for these people. Imagine the sense of helplessness these people had when everything they believed in, including such constants as the river and the sun totally and completely failed them. In fact, in some respects, it seemed as if these gods had actually turned against them.

The Egyptians could do nothing but stay in their homes and consider these things as well as wonder and fret over what was to happen next.

By the way, this awful darkness covered Egypt, again, for three days. At the same time, the people of Israel had light where they lived. What a picture of dark and light, of being lost and saved. The children of God walked in the light while Pharaoh and his people wandered in the darkness.

3. THE TENTH AND FINAL PLAGUE WAS THE PLAGUE ON THE FIRSTBORN.

Exodus 11:1, 4-7 notes, **“Now the LORD had said to Moses, ‘I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely.’**

“So Moses said, ‘This is what the LORD says: “About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt--worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.” Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.”

Imagine this plague happening to America. What if every firstborn child, every firstborn among the livestock, were to suddenly drop over dead? The anguish would be beyond words. Nearly every family would be affected. In many instances, the primary caregiver and breadwinner would be gone. Gone, again, in an instant.

Some have estimated that this plague resulted in the instantaneous death of ten percent of Egypt’s population. However, even that doesn’t describe the full measure of the horror of this particular plague. The firstborn always referred to males, and they were the pride and joy of the Egyptians. The oldest son “was the hope, stay, and support of the household, his father’s companion, his mother’s joy, the object of his brother’s and sister’s reverence.” He was the “crown prince” of the household as well as the successor to his father. Short of the general destruction of the whole nation, this was as bad as it could get.

This disaster would create a great and tragic howl throughout all Egypt. Those who have studied the culture of the East know about the shrill cry of the mourners. This would be the greatest cry every heard in Egypt before or after.

In the battle of the gods, this was the tenth and final round. The God of the Hebrews was about to win by a knock-out.

I want to now share with you a short clip from the classic film by Cecil B. DeMille, *The Ten Commandments*. Yul Brynner, in the role of Pharaoh, is having to deal with the death of his son – his first born. Notice: **(SHOW CLIP)**

(He places his firstborn son in the arms of the falcon-headed god, Seker [who protected the dead as they passed through the underworld], and said, “Seker, great lord of the lower world, I...bow before you now. Show that you have power above the God of Moses. Restore the life

he has taken from my son. Guide back his soul across the lake of death to the place of living men.”)

I find it fascinating that even Hollywood recognized that in the end this was a battle of the gods. You noticed, I’m sure, that Seker was powerless to help the child; powerless to help Pharaoh.

At least six deities were committed to the protection of Egypt’s children. I want to read a portion of a paragraph from the book that I alluded to earlier, *The Gods Who Walk Among Us*: “By initiating the death of the firstborn, Yahweh executed His final judgment **“against all the gods of Egypt”**. Heka was proven powerless. Isis was defunct. Min was unable to energize the pharaoh’s son. Horus was equally inept. The pharaoh was without a successor to watch over his tomb. Amun-Ra was without earthly representation. Egypt was without an heir. And the whole of (Egyptian pagan worship), with its magic, myths, and rituals, crumbled at once beneath the feet of the Hebrew God.”

LISTEN AS I MAKE AN APPLICATION OF THIS FOR YOU AND ME TODAY

Exodus 20:2-5 declares, **“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’ ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God....”**

I want to point out something that is very important – something that is very consistent about God. He stands solidly against idolatry in any form.

No doubt, many of you remember the time that Israel made a golden calf and worshipped it as a god. Notice now the Lord’s reaction as found in Exodus 32:35, **“And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.”**

A casual reading of the book of Revelation reveals that eventually the gods of this world will again be judged and destroyed; man made gods, religious gods, economic gods.... They will all be dealt with and brought down in a moment’s time.

Do you have an idol in your life? Do you give allegiance to some false god? The Apostle Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 10:14, **“Flee from idolatry.”** Don’t you think it strange that he wrote that command to a church? And yet, when you think about it, the command is not strange at all.

Let me give you two of my favorite definitions of idolatry. I know that I shared this first one early on in this series, but it bears repeating:

- “Whatever comes between you and the Lord, in your daily living, is your idol.”
- Then too, “Idolatry is worship, in which the honor due to God, and to God only, is given to some of His creatures, or to some invention of His creatures.” (J. C. Ryle)

The noted commentator J. C. Ryle once wrote:

“It is not necessary, for a man to formally deny God and Christ, in order to be an idolater. Far from it. Professed reverence for the God of the Bible and actual idolatry, are perfectly compatible. They have often been done side by side, and they still do so. The children of Israel never thought of renouncing God when they persuaded Aaron to make the golden calf. **“Here are your gods,”** they said, **“who brought you up out of Egypt.”** And the feast in honor of the calf was kept as a **“festival to the LORD (Jehovah)”** (Exodus 32:4,5).

The idol was not set up as a rival to God, but under the pretense of being a help—a steppingstone to His service. But nevertheless, a great sin was committed. The honor due to God was given to a visible representation of Him. The majesty of Jehovah was offended. The second commandment was broken. There was, in the eyes of God, a flagrant act of idolatry.”

Friends, I believe that we have come to a time when the subject of idolatry demands a thorough and searching investigation. I do not believe that I am too far off when I say that idolatry is near us, all around us, and in the midst of us. We should be concerned.

Someone, I don't know who, noted:

"This is the sin, of all others, which has brought down the heaviest judgments on the Church. It brought on Israel the armies of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. It scattered the ten tribes, burned up Jerusalem, and carried Judah and Benjamin into captivity. It brought on the Eastern Churches, in later days, the overwhelming flood of the Muslim invasion, and turned many a spiritual garden into a wilderness. The desolation which reigns where Cyprian and Augustine once preached, the living death in which the Churches of Asia Minor and Syria are buried, are all attributable to this sin. All testify to the same great truth which the Lord proclaims in Isaiah: **"I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols"** (Isaiah 42:8).

For a number of years, we in the United States have been fed a steady diet of:

- "Greed is good".
- "It's the economy, stupid", and
- "Show me the money."

Millions have worshipped at the shrines of corporate profits, dot-coms, the American dream, and a higher bottom line.

Look, though, at what has happened to the gods of finance in this nation over the past number of months.

- First, we had the recession set in.
- Next came the terrorists attacks.
- Now we have the terrible scandals that are rocking corporate America.
- Some of the biggest names in business are in deep trouble: Enron, Arthur Anderson, Worldcom, Global Crossing, K-Mart, Martha Stewart, and Xerox, just to name a few.
- Stocks just closed out the worst two quarters in the last 30 years.
- Friends, these issues give rise to some very important questions?
- Could it be that we are eye-witnesses to another battle of the gods?
- Could we be seeing the Lord exact judgment against the gods of greed, materialism, and "me-ism"?

I don't know the answer.

There are other false gods out there:

- The entertainment industry,
- Knowledge,
- Pride,
- Pleasure,
- Maybe even religion or religious personalities?

Are they next on the hit list?

A.W. Tozer wrote: "Grace will save a man... but it will not save him and his idol." If you want grace, then you have to rid yourself of any false god that you hold to.

In Exodus 12:31-32 Pharaoh finally commands the Hebrews to leave. Verse 33 notes, **"The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. 'For otherwise,' they said, 'we will all die!'"** They could tell that the noose was tightening. They didn't know but that another plague was on the way which would result in the death of everyone that was still living.

Again, as in the previous judgments, God protected His people. The Bible points out that not even a dog would bark among the Israelites. The Lord surely knows those who are His in the battle of the gods.

THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Part 5

- Why do the wicked prosper?
- Why does God allow suffering in the world?
- How could a good God send people to hell?
- Did Judas have a choice, or was he in fact created to betray Jesus?
- Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart?

These are serious questions. Inquiring minds want to know. Each one has been asked a zillion times. Books have been written, sermons have been preached, whole courses in theology and philosophy have been taught on just one of these questions, let alone all five.

Well this morning, as I put a wrap on my series on The Battle of the Gods, I want to focus in on the last of the questions – Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart?

Please turn to Exodus 4:21 in your Bibles. The passage states, **“The LORD said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.”**

Did you catch it? God said that He would harden the heart of Pharaoh.

- Again, how could such a thing be?
- How could a good God, a just God, punish a man for that which He causes or He does through that man?
- Does this indicate that perhaps God was responsible for Pharaoh's sin?
- Does God yet harden hearts today?

These are some of the issues that we will explore this morning.

NOW, FOR A FEW MOMENTS, I WANT US TO LOOK AT THE NATURE OF THIS LEADER OF THE EGYPTIANS; THIS PHARAOH.

Exodus 1:8 (*The New Living Translation*) says, **“Then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done.”**

As I noted in the first message in this series, this guy was meaner than “a junkyard dog!” Again, sin, cruelty, deceit, pagan occult practices -- all marked his life! He was bad news! Human life held little value to him – including the lives of his own people. Modern-day counterparts might be Hitler or Stalin.

I also want us to note this man's spiritual condition. Exodus 5:2 quotes him as saying, **“Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.”** Pharaoh recognized no authority other than himself. He was vain and full of ego. He literally dared to assert his will above the will of Almighty God.

It is my opinion that the fellow may well have been under the control and influence of certain demon powers. This is an important point.

- He resisted the word and authority of the God of the Hebrews.
- He tyrannized the people of God.
- He surrounded himself with what we today would call sorcerers and wizards.
- His magicians seemed to have amazing occultic powers.
- He offered up human sacrifices -- including children -- to his deities.

- He worshipped numerous false gods.

I personally believe that the Egyptian deities evolved from and were impersonations of demonic powers; evil spirits! This is the main reason that the Lord set Himself against these things. The Bible flat-out states that when Jesus came, He came in order to destroy the works of the evil one.

The secular book, *The Black Arts*, notes, "Devils are usually other people's gods." The Old Testament records a numbers of instances where Baal, or Ashtaroth, or Moloch, or Dagon were worshipped as idols when, in fact, they were demons whose likeness had been made into some false deity! To put it simply, an idol was a front for a demon often with the very same name. Destroying the works of the evil one has long been high on God's agenda.

Participation in idolatry was and is fellowshiping with devils. The devil and his angels or demons are behind all idolatry, whether the idolatry of a heathen society or of an educated society. Scripture definitely declares in 1 Corinthians 10:20, **"...the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons."**

Psalm 106:35-37 confirms, **"...they (Israel) mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan...."**

Notice again, **"They worshiped their idols..., They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons."**

Note what Scripture says: when people make sacrifices (whether animals, their children, or even themselves) to something other than God, they are sacrificing to devils. Pharaoh did that very thing! He was under the power and influence of the devil! Again, he was one wicked man.

MOVING ON, NOW. EXODUS 7:13 NOTES, "YET PHARAOH'S HEART BECAME HARD AND HE WOULD NOT LISTEN TO THEM, (MOSES AND AARON) JUST AS THE LORD HAD SAID."

Immediately following this verse, the process of the ten plagues begins. I am going to list the ten plagues once again. As I do so in passing, I want you to notice with me the various stages of Pharaoh's heart. You will see it change – grow hard – right before your eyes.

THE FIRST PLAGUE -- THE WATER IS TURNED INTO BLOOD.

Exodus 7:22, **"But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard...."**

Because the magician's were able to duplicate this feat, Pharaoh stiffened in his resolve not to obey the words of Moses even though the plague continued on for seven days.

THE SECOND PLAGUE WAS OF FROGS.

When this plague hit, the king asked for help. He promised to let the Hebrews go and make sacrifices. However, as soon as he got a little relief, he again hardened his wicked heart. His seeming change of heart was not sincere and he quickly went back on his word.

NEXT COMES THE PLAGUE OF LICE

Pharaoh's response? **"But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen...."**

THE FORTH PLAGUE WAS OF FLIES

As a result of this scourge, the king decided to let the people go and worship, only he said that they couldn't go very far. At this Moses prayed and the flies left to the extent that not one single fly remained behind.

Exodus 8:32 then notes, **“But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.”** In the face of this great witness of God’s power, **Pharaoh only made his heart harder.** He was setting himself more and more against God and God’s people.

THE FIFTH PLAGUE WAS ON THE LIVESTOCK.

As before, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. Instead of turning toward God, he blamed God.

THE SIXTH PLAGUE – THE PLAGUE OF PAINFUL BOILS

This is the first time that the scriptures record **THAT GOD HARDENED** the heart of Pharaoh. The hardening of his heart now becomes a part of the judgment of God. The evil king had resisted and resisted to the point that now God Himself actually adds to the hardness of the heart.

In the Old Testament, God often punished people by giving them the very punishment which they had chosen for themselves. The king had chosen hardness and he got hardness!

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE WAS HAIL MIXED WITH LIGHTNING!

How did Pharaoh react? This time the king was truly frightened. He confessed that he had sinned. He acknowledge that God was right and that he and his people were wrong. He begged for mercy and again promised to let the people go.

Exodus 9:33-35 then says, **“Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the LORD; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.”**

Many people confess sin, make vows, appear penitent under judgment, only to reveal their true selves when the trial passes. The depth of one’s real change is made manifest when the outward circumstances change.

Pharaoh’s heart continued to be hard regardless! This time though, the Bible notes that his officials also had hardened their hearts. His sin was contagious!

THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

Listen to verses 16-20: **“Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the LORD your God to take this deadly plague away from me.’ Moses then left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. And the LORD changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.”**

Haven’t you seen people like this evil fellow? “OK God, you win. UNCLE!!! Forgive me. Heal me. I’m yours.” But just as soon as the crisis is over, they revert back to their old wicked ways.

Pharaoh hadn’t really changed; he was simply scared.

Let me draw an interesting parallel here. Immediately following the tragic events of September 11 church attendance and giving to charities in America soared. People were talking about revival. People were flocking to altars seeking to make things right with God. It was exciting as well as encouraging.

Would you like to know what has happened since? Church attendance is back to where it was before the attacks. In many areas, actual numbers reflect a 25% drop in peoples in the pews! Like Pharaoh, oh how quickly we forget once the plague is past!

THE NINTH PLAGUE WAS THE PLAGUE OF DARKNESS

Exodus 10: 27 declares: **“But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go.”**

THE TENTH AND FINAL PLAGUE WAS THE PLAGUE ON THE FIRSTBORN.

In Exodus 12:31-32 the king finally commands the Hebrews to leave.

NOTICE NOW THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY.

I want to return to a point that I briefly made in the second message in this series. Exodus 7:17 declares, **“This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD....”** Then Exodus 8:22 adds, **“...so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land.”**

Throughout this process, God was establishing His Lordship before the Egyptians.

- He was the Lord over the Nile.
- He was the Lord over the cattle.
- He was the Lord over the land.
- He was Lord over light and darkness.
- He was the Lord over life.

He was and is the Lord!

Along this line I want to point out that there is another pattern in the grouping of the plagues:

- The first three were initiated by Aaron, with the use of Moses' staff; and they involved water and land.
- The next three were initiated by Moses without use of the staff, and involved man and beasts.
- The next three, finally, were initiated by Moses, with the use of his staff, and revealed God's power to strike from the air.
- The point is, He is Lord over the water and the land, Lord over man and beasts, and Lord over the air. Again, He is Lord!

Then too:

- God announced the coming of each plague.
- He caused them to end again at His Divinely ordained time.
- He clearly distinguished between the Hebrew slaves and the people of Egypt.

Yes, He is Lord!

He then drew the whole episode to a close by drowning the entire army of Egypt in the same Red Sea which formed a passageway to freedom and redemption for the Jewish people. He is the Lord!

THINKING BACK OVER THE TEN PLAGUES, I WANT YOU TO NOTICE:

1. Pharaoh first knowingly and willingly hardened his own heart. He set his mind to resist and oppose the plans and purposes of Almighty God. The more he resisted the Lord, the harder his heart became. Exodus 7:14 (*King James Version*) thus notes, **“And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuseth to let the people go.”**

The word hardened as used here is *kabad* (cop paid) in the Hebrew. It means among other things, “difficult, stupid, grievous, hardened, slow, or thick” according to *Strong's Hebrew English Dictionary*.

2. Only after the process had continued on for some time -- the plagues may have lasted for as long as a full year -- does God step in and harden Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh, the Bible shows, hardened his own heart long before it is said that the Lord hardened it! In fact, it was not until after the 5th plague hit Egypt that the King's heart was hardened by anything or anyone other than himself.

Certainly it must never be said that God causes a man to be or do that which is wicked. James 1:13 notes, **“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone....”** Pharaoh was responsible for his own evil choices; Pharaoh was responsible for his own hard heart.

3. It should be noted that the Bible tells us of 9 instances where it is said that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart; 3 instances where it is said that he hardened his own heart; and 5 instances where his heart was hardened without any indication as to who was to blame.

4. It is important to note here that when people set their wills -- their minds -- against God, God has the choice of giving them up to their own base desires. Listen to these three fearful passages:

- Romans 1:24, **“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.”**
- Romans 1:28, **“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.”**
- Romans 9:18 adds, **“Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom he wants to harden.”**

“He gave them over”; **“He hardened.”** The prerogative belongs to God! Any heart that proves to be unyielding, resistant, and callused toward God stands in a place of unimaginable danger! This is borne out again and again in the story of this evil Pharaoh!

When the Bible declares that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, many think this means that God imposed upon the king a condition, a situation, wherein he had no choice. A condition where this man had to oppose God’s will just so God could make an example out of him! This is, again, not the case.

- If Joseph had still been on the throne of Egypt, the situation would have been much different.
- If David would have occupied the throne, again things would not have been the same.
- Even if Solomon would have been the king of Egypt, the whole story would have had a different ending.

Why? Because of the difference in the men’s hearts.

God hardens no one’s heart who has not first hardened it himself! By eventually hardening Pharaoh’s heart, God was simply allowing the process of the Pharaoh’s own evil, cruel, activities to continue on a pre-set course.

God is never said to harden the heart of a good person or of one who is set to do righteously. It is always those who are bent on evil whom God hardens! In Pharaoh’s case, God only used the material that the king provided! The king sinned his own sins and made his own choices.

THE BIBLE PLAINLY SHOWS US THAT PHARAOH IS NOT THE ONLY ONE IN HISTORY WHO SUFFERED FROM A HARD HEART.

Notice Psalm 81:11-12 (Berkeley’s translation) **“But My people did not listen to My voice; Israel would not obey Me. So I left them TO THE HARDNESS OF THEIR HEARTS....”**

Psalm 95 likewise warns of this. Notice verses 7-9 (*New King James Version*), **“Today, if you will hear His voice: ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work.’”**

Believe me when I say, Israel majored in hard hearts!

Hebrews 3:13 (*The Amplified Bible*) warns of being **“hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”** That was Pharaoh, that was Israel.

The hardening effect of sin is somewhat borne out in these figures showing the percentage of conversions per age group:

- 1% - saved before age 4
- 85% - saved from ages 4-15
- 10% - saved from ages 15-30
- 4% - saved after the age of 30!

F. B. Meyer, author/preacher of yesteryear, once noted: "If the world is ever to be saved, it must be saved through childhood." The statistics show, and the quote of F. B. Meyer shows, continued sin results in a hardened nature toward God!

DO YOU HAVE A HARD HEART?

1 Samuel 6:6 (*New American Standard*) asks, "**Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?**" Good question.

Notice the judgments associated with such a heart:

- If men do not want to retain God in their knowledge, He eventually can give them up to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28).
- If men continue to resist His Spirit, He can take His Spirit from them (Psalm 51:11).
- If one gets tired of God's Spirit dealing with him, he can rest assured that "**God's Spirit shall not always strive with man**" (Genesis 6:3).
- Proverbs 29:1 (*New American Standard*) likewise warns, "**A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.**"

DO ANY OF YOU RECOGNIZE THE NAME SAM KINISON? IN MY OPINION, KINISON'S STORY PROVIDES US WITH A TRAGIC TESTIMONY OF THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THOSE VERSES. (OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF SAM KINISON)

Much of that which I am about to share comes from several Internet web sites that are devoted to Kinison's memory. Sam Kinison was one of the loudest and rudest comedians of the 20th century. Born on December 8th, 1953 in Yakima, Washington, Sam Kinison's beginnings were fairly innocent. His father was a Pentecostal preacher, and the family lived in a church in Peoria, Illinois.

(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF SAM'S FAMILY IN CHURCH) Sam and his brothers followed in their father's footsteps by touring churches across the Bible Belt and earning a decent living as evangelists. **(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF SAM PREACHING)** But that wasn't enough for Sam. Eventually, he turned to rock 'n' roll and then comedy clubs.

His life became the classic image of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. Sam's shows sold out like arena rock concerts, and he quickly earned the respect of the biggest rock acts of the late eighties, like Motley Crue, Guns n' Roses, and Ozzy Osbourne, most of whom appeared in Sam's music videos. Hard-drinking and hard-partying became a major part of his act.

By the way, you might find this interesting, Kinison once dated Jessica Hawn. You will remember her from her role in the PTL -- Jim Bakker scandal.

On April 10th, 1992, on their way to a sold-out gig in Laughlin, Nevada, newlyweds Sam and Malika Kinison were struck head-on by a pickup truck driven by a 17-year-old drunk driver. They were driving Sam's Pontiac Trans-Am on U.S. Highway 95, on a narrow stretch between Needles and Barstow. Sam, 38, who was not wearing a seatbelt, died on the scene. According to a newspaper account of the accident, he repeatedly said that he did not want to die prior to passing away in the arms of a friend. Malika, 27, was knocked unconscious but suffered only minor injuries.

I want to now share a few "Kinisonisms", as they are called:

- “I used to be a preacher, I used to be a minister, and people think I changed overnight, and I didn't. It wasn't like I just woke up one day and said, 'HEY, FORGET THE BIBLE! WHERE'S THE PARTY?' It was a little more gradual than that, it took a little more time, it took a lot of women to disillusion me.”
- “People are going: 'Man, aren't you afraid to tell jokes like that? Don't you get just a small chill that runs through your blood when you tell a joke like that? Aren't you afraid of going to hell?' No, I'm not worried about hell.”
- “I have lived a carnal life. My view of life is 'If you're going to miss Heaven, why miss it by two inches? Miss it!' I don't have to go through the thing of paying for it in the next life.”

(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY) I have here a picture here of Kinison and a group of twelve females making a mockery of the Lord's Last Supper. This is taken from a web site of a bar and restaurant that is owned by Bill Kinison, Sam's brother. The picture evidently hangs from the wall there. Bill, who also used to preach with Sam, owns the bar and is committed to keeping his brother's memory alive.

Finally, I want to share the epitaph from Sam's gravestone: **(OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY OF GRAVESTONE)**

“In another time and place, he would have been called prophet.”

Samuel Burl Kinison

Dec. 8, 1953

April 10, 1992

Oh the tragedy of turning away from God, oh the tragedy of having a hard heart!

PHARAOH REAPED WHAT HE HAD SOWN!

God's laws are justly meted out - to king and comedian alike. Being Pharaoh afforded the king no special privileges.

Friends, believe me when I say that sin hardens hearts, lives, faces, men. Grace softens hearts, lives, faces, men!

The same sun that softens the butter hardens the clay. The same as a Gospel message might draw someone to the Lord, such a message might also be refused and thus be a part of the awful process of hardening a heart.

Sin, continued involvement in sin, carries a high price tag! With Pharaoh the cost was a hard heart -- and death.