

Great Tribulations / The Plagues of Egypt #1 – Nile to Blood / Exodus 7:14-21

Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. But all these are just the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted. Some of you will be put to death. But all of you will be hated by all the nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

If you really want to get a sense of what we really believe regarding the troubles we face in this life and how to make sense of them as a child of God, then pay close attention to the songs we sing on Sundays. (1) *By and by, when the morning comes. When the saints of God are gathered home. We will tell the story of how we've overcome. And we'll understand it better by and by.* (2) *There's a land that is fairer than day. And by faith we can see it afar. For the father waits over the way. To prepare us a dwelling place there. In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful.* (3) *Tempted and tried we're oft made to wonder. Why it should be thus all day the long. While there are others living about us. Never molested, though in the wrong. Farther along we'll. Know all about it. Farther along we'll understand why. Cheer up my brothers. Live in the sunshine. We'll understand it. All by and by.*

Those two last lines sum up our trouble quandary quite well, don't they? We'll understand them, all by and by, because we sure don't understand them right now! Why is it, Lord, that when I pray to you about my thorn in the flesh, you seem to respond by multiplying thorns, not taking the thorn away? I might understand it all by and by. But I sure don't understand it now. Why is it Lord that my troubles seem to get worse at the precise moment that I make more of a concentrated effort to be faithful to you in all things? I realize I'll understand all by and by. But I sure don't understand it right now. Why do the righteous struggle and the wicked prosper? I realize I'll understand it all by and by. But I sure don't understand it right now. The People of the Book didn't just have troubles. They had great troubles. That's why they called them tribulations. For 430 years, they prayed for thorns to be removed, but they seemed to multiply instead. For 430 years, they wondered why it should be thus all the day long. While there were Egyptians living about them. Never molested though in the wrong.

But, church, I want to tell you this morning – and over the course of the next ten weeks – that at the precise moment the people of the Book made more of a concentrated effort to follow the Lord, it seemed to them that their tribulations increased. But, church, I also want to tell you this morning that all was not what it seemed. The People of the Book saw water turning into blood, but the God of the Bible saw a triumph. They saw a plague of frogs, but God saw a triumph. They saw plagues of gnats, flies, livestock and boils, but God saw triumphs. They saw plagues of boils, hail, locusts and darkness, but God saw triumph. They saw a plague of the firstborn, but God saw a Passover. Here is why you need to listen: great tribulations don't occur in life because God is cruel. They occur because God is love and He cares. They don't occur because God is absent in them. They occur because He's sovereign over them. They don't occur because God hasn't answered our prayers. They occur because He has. In order to see that, please turn with me to the first part of the First Great Tribulation recorded in the Bible. It's not in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount or the Book of Revelation. Instead, you will find it in Exodus 7:14-24. Let's read it together:

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. ¹⁶ Then say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.'" ¹⁹ 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 vessels of wood and stone." ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as

the Lord had said. ²³ Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

Great Tribulations Have:

1. A Provident Message

- **Consecutive Billboard Marketing:** (1) Whoever came up with the strategy to sell companies on advertising with consecutive billboards needs to be in charge of our national debt; (2) Driving from Mobile to Montgomery, Alabama: Last. Gas. For. Miles. (3) Message isn't complete without each word.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The plagues of Egypt were a complete message from the God of the Hebrews. They were His way of saying: "there will be justice for my people" and "judgment for their oppressors."
- **Textual Emphasis:** In verse 16, the plague narratives begin with the phrase: "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews..." // Translated that means: "The Master, the God in Covenant with the Overcomers" // Then Ten Plagues follow, which progressively get worse; brought on by refusal.
- **Significance of Ten:** (1) 10 is an important number in the Bible (a) 10 Commandments; (b) Passover Lamb chosen on the 10th day of the 1st month; (c) Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel and his friends 10 times better than all the wise men in Babylon; (d) Jesus healed 10 men of leprosy; (2) 10, then, is the number of completeness; totality; (3) Idea is that the Covenant God of the Hebrews is about to give a message to Pharaoh and, by the time it's finished, it will be complete judgment in this case.
- **App:** Tribulation is God's megaphone to awaken deafness to him. They contain a message for the sufferer and the oppressor; a message that's complete and total.

2. A Spiritual Battle

- **My Professional Wrestling Debut:** (1) I wanted to be a professional wrestler when I was a kid; so I tried it in my neighborhood. (2) I was good too. I came in with the Ric Flair strut. (3) But my knockout move really set me apart from the other neighborhood prospects. (4) I wrestled with sunglasses on and then when I threatened to remove them, watch out. (5) Because if I did and gave you the death stare, BAAM...it was over. (6) Neighborhood kids were no match for my strut, my eyes and my stare.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The Plagues of Egypt the God of the Hebrews inflicted upon the land were His way of saying "your false 'g'ods" are powerless because they are a product of your own making."
- **Textual Emphasis:** V 17 // I will strike the water of the Nile and change it to blood // Begins God's battle for supremacy over Egyptian (g)ods.
- **Hapi, The Egyptian God of the Nile:** (1) Egyptian's thought her to be the creator and sustainer of water; (2) The water she created, she sent straight into the Nile River. (3) The belief was that as Hapi poured water into the Nile, she pushed silt to the side so they could use it to plant crops. Turning into blood not only made the life of the river lifeless but made the silt infertile as well. With no silt, there are no crops. No water. No fish. No collection of silt equaled a barren land in the future. (4) Nile to blood was an attack on Who the Egyptians thought provided life itself: Hapi. It was the God of the Hebrews instead that had power to give life and make it fertile. Or take it away. That's why he did it for seven straight days.
- **App:** Tribulations are displays of who is powerful (The God of the Bible) and who/what is powerless ("g"ods in our image we turn to that can't save).

3. A Personal Vulnerability

- **Every Conversation On the Way to the Pediatrician's Office With a Child:** (1) This is universal. (2) "Where are we going?" "To the doctor's office." "Why?" "For a checkup." "Mom and Dad, is the doctor going to prick my finger?" (3) To the parent, it was a finger prick. To the child, it was an amputation.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The People of the Book went through some of the plagues with the Egyptians. They were, however, spared from the worst of them.
- **Textual Emphasis:** V19 and V21 // The phrase "blood was everywhere in Egypt" anchors the whole passage to let the reader know the totality of the tribulation/plague God has brought about in Egypt. That's why it occurs twice.
- **Goshen, Where the Israelites Lived:** (1) The Israelites lived in Egypt in an area called Goshen; (2) What's interesting about this land is that it is mentioned frequently in the plague narratives, almost as if to say "this is what happened to God's people while these tribulations/plagues were taking place; (3) In the narrative of the plague of flies (4), God tells Moses: ²² *"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. 23 I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This sign will occur tomorrow.” (5) That doesn't occur until plague #4. (6) That means that the Hebrews went through the Nile to Blood, the Frogs and the Gnats with the Egyptians. It affected them also; though there was grace apportioned to them as they went through it (only the Egyptians couldn't drink the water).

- **App:** What God subjects His people to and spares His people from are demonstrative proof of His love, protection, and ability to sustain. In other words, there's a test in tribulation and there's a protection from others.

4. A Universal Opportunity

- **When Preacher's Leave a Note at the Door:** (1) Odds are great, if you are not home, they will leave you a note. (2) But if they write Revelation 3:20 beside their name, be sure to look it up. (3) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** For the People of the Book, the Plagues they went through (1-3) and were spared from represented an opportunity to say: "behold the power of God." For the Egyptians, Pharaoh, they were an opportunity to repent. They were God's way of saying: "your time is about to run out." Unfortunately, for them it did.
- **Textual Emphasis:** V22 // The Egyptian magicians did same thing. As a result, Pharaoh's heart became hard // What magicians were able to do softened the blow of judgment in Pharaoh's mind.
- **Magicians of Egypt:** (1) They were known as Masters of Illusion in the Ancient World; (2) They replicated the miracle through imitation. (2) And it wasn't the first time. In the previous passage, they performed an illusion of the staff to snake. (3) Snake charmers in Egypt had the ability to cause snake to stiffen and relax on command. Such an illusion would have satisfied Pharaoh. (4) Same thing with replicating miracle of Nile to blood. (5) Red dye – common and available in large quantities from plant roots in Egypt would have done it also. (6) What they couldn't do was render the Nile lifeless for seven days; and make the silt unfertile. Idea is that Egypt, when faced with the superiority of the God of the Bible, still refused to repent.
- **App:** Opportunity for Egypt was to repent. 10 times Moses went to Pharaoh. 10 times he refused. That's what imitation does. It softens the blow in a way that makes One's heart calloused. It was also an opportunity for the Israelites to say: "behold the power of God." That's what tribulations are designed to make people do. Make a conclusion: belief or unbelief.