

Exodus Chapters 7-8: God's Judgment

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Exodus

Pharaoh refused to listen to God's demand, through Moses, to release Israel from slavery. In turn, Moses announced God's judgment to Pharaoh through an increasingly severe series of ecological disasters. These disasters caused personal misery. More significantly, they drastically impaired the productive capacity of Egypt's land and people. Disease caused livestock to die. Crops failed and forests were ruined. Pests invaded multiple ecosystems. In Exodus, ecological disaster is the retribution of God against the tyranny and oppression of Pharaoh. In the modern world, political and economic oppression is a major factor in environmental degradation and ecological disaster. We would be fools to think we can assume Moses' authority and declare God's judgment in any of these. But we can see that when economics, politics, culture, and society are in need of redemption, so is the environment.

Each of these warnings-in-action convinced Pharaoh to release Israel, but as each passed, he reneged. Finally, God brought on the disaster of slaying every firstborn son among the people and animals of the Egyptians. The appalling effect of slavery is to "harden" the heart against compassion, justice, and even self-preservation, as Pharaoh soon discovered. Pharaoh then accepted God's demand to let Israel go free. The departing Israelites

“plundered” the Egyptians’ jewelry, silver, gold, and clothing. This reversed the effects of slavery, which was the legalized plunder of exploited workers. When God liberates people, he restores their right to labor for fruits they themselves can enjoy. Work, and the conditions under which it is performed, is a matter of the highest concern to God.