

THE PLAGUES

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Lessons: *Exodus 7-10*

There is a story in the book of Exodus where, seven times in a row, the Lord says, “**I will.**” That seven-fold promise was given when people were sad and hopeless and miserable and very much in need of a promise.

We will talk about the Lord’s kind of promise, but let’s first talk about quite another kind of promise. Let’s talk about the kind of promise people can make because of something they want. But it is a promise that they forget about later on. It is a promise that is not kept.

Do you ever hear someone say, “Oh, please” (when they are talking about what they want), and then say, “I promise I **will**...? Do you ever hear yourself saying it? As we grow up we begin to learn to look at our own promises more carefully. When very young we really mean it when we say, “If you will let me own a dog, I promise I will feed him every day, and take him for walks, and clean up any mess he makes.” A little child does not know what he may be promising. And he might feel a little ashamed when someone says, “But didn't you promise? Didn't you say, ‘I will?’”

Well, that is part of growing up. It is not bad. It begins to be bad when we promise we will not do something wrong, and then we keep going against the promise we made. Let’s think about the story of Pharaoh. It reminds us of a statement in the Writings that when a bad person is forced, he promises that he is sorry and that he will be good, but then when he is feeling free he just goes right back to his evil. An evil man, who, while in a state of constraint, promises to repent and even does what is good, returns to his former life of evil as soon as he is in a state of freedom again” (*The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 168)”

Isn’t that what happened with Pharaoh? He was very cruel to the Children of Israel and would not let them go. And when the Lord sent a plague against him he would finally say that if only the plague would stop, then he would let the people go. And then the plague did stop, but did he keep his promise? You know the answer to that.

And you also know that the Lord kept sending plagues until at last Pharaoh had to let them go.

Now what about the good promises of the Lord? Think of how sad the people felt. They were not free. They were being cruelly treated, and it got much worse,

because after Moses first spoke to Pharaoh, Pharaoh got even crueller. And so the sixth chapter of Exodus is said to show that “Now they are encouraged with hope, and with the promise that they are certainly to be set free” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7183).

Do you ever feel so bad that promises do not cheer you up? That is how bad it had become. When people are in a very sad state, it is so hard for them to be cheered up, even when they are told good things. Note these words: “They harkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage” (*Exodus* 6:9).

Another way of saying that would be, “They just couldn't believe it, because they felt so terrible and were suffering so much.”

Well, the Lord knew their sorrow. He said that He had “heard the groaning of the Children of Israel,” and then He said very clearly what He would do. Whether they believed it or not, He was saying the truth—His promise. It goes like this. Notice the seven times it says, “**I will.**”

“...I am the Lord; **I will** bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, **I will** rescue you from their bondage, and **I will** redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

“**I will** take you as My people, and **I will** be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

“And **I will** bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and **I will** give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord”
(Exodus 6:6-8)