

Abstract

**“Experiencing God’s Patience Alongside Pharaoh’s Politics
—and the Plagues and Politics of South Africa.”**

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This paper lies at the intersection between the politics of South Africa’s leaders, the spirituality of its people, and the biblical text on the page. It takes the plagues and politics of ancient Egypt in the Exodus narrative and (along with existing comparisons in the South African Press) compares the malefactions of Jacob Zuma with Pharaoh’s stubbornness and pride, and the effects that these have had on the country.

Those who seek divine spiritual reassurance from the Bible, silently struggle at what seems to be God manipulating Pharaoh for his own ends. Challenged by what they read in the New Testament book of Romans (10:17-18), concerned Christian readers often re-read the Exodus narrative with a hyper-spiritual view of God’s power over Pharaoh, as if God was pulling the strings of Pharaoh’s heart and actions as a mere puppet. Many of these misconceptions arise on account of failing to read Pharaoh’s politics and God’s actions in the particular *sequence* they occur in the narrative.

In this paper, I will outline the events surrounding Pharaoh’s recalcitrance, and then draw a number of observations from a narratological perspective, especially looking at the sequence of events that led God to harden Pharaoh’s heart. More importantly, I will show at what stages of this sequence God begins to increase the pressure upon Pharaoh. We will see how divine patience has worn thin only after a protracted “posturing” of Pharaonic politics. I will also draw from narrative and political theory to show why God is justified to move to an ever-intensifying response to Pharaoh. Finally, I will use these observations and apply them to South African politics to offer my readers lessons for a renewed spiritual hope in a just God alongside the devastating effects of Jacob Zuma’s power ploys upon a weary nation.