

Jimmy Goes to Sunday School

By Ward Ricker

Episode 8 – The Exodus

Jimmy was showing his new calculator to his friend Aaron as they walked toward the church. “It has all kinds of different functions which I don’t even understand, but daddy said he would explain how they all work when he had time.”

“Wow, I will have to get one like that!” Aaron exclaimed as they proceeded inside.

“It’s wonderful to see you all back,” Mrs. Peabody started off the Sunday School class, as all the children who had the flu the previous week streamed into the room. “How god answers prayer!”

“Yes,” Jimmy added, looking around the room, and then addressed the teacher, “I guess you were able to change god’s mind, after all.”

Giving Jimmy a dirty look, Mrs. Peabody continued. “You remember that last week we left Jacob’s family in Egypt, where they moved because of the great famine. Well, Jacob’s descendants stayed in Egypt for 400 years, and during that time they grew into a great nation of people. But then another Pharaoh arose who didn’t know Joseph and didn’t respect god, and he began to treat the people of Israel very harshly. He made slaves out of them and made them work very hard. Not only that, but the Israelites were becoming so numerous that it made the Pharaoh very uncomfortable, and he thought that if the Israelites were to rise up against Egypt they would be a very powerful foe, so he ordered that all the male children who were born to them should be killed.

“One day, though, a baby boy was born to a certain Israelite. Not wanting her child to be killed, she hid him for three months, but when she couldn’t hide him any longer she made a basket out of reeds, put the baby in it and placed the basket in the reeds on the edge of the Nile. After that, the daughter of the Pharaoh came down to wash in the river, saw the baby in the basket and knew that it was one of the Israelite babies, but, instead of having it killed, she decided to take it home and raise it herself. She named it Moses.

“Well, when Moses grew up and got to be about 40 years old, he went out one day and saw an Egyptian man beating one of the Israelites. When Moses saw this, he was mad, and so he killed the Egyptian man and buried him in the sand. The next day he went out and found two Israelite men fighting and asked why one of them was hitting the other. The attacker responded, ‘What business is it of yours? Are you going to kill me like you did the Egyptian yesterday?’

“When Moses realized that people knew what he had done, he realized that Pharaoh would be mad at him and that he was in great danger, so he ran off to a country called Midian to live. Arriving in Midian, he came to a well. Some daughters of a priest named Reuel came along to draw water from the well to water their flocks, but some shepherds drove them away. When Moses saw this, he helped the women get water for their flocks. Reuel then invited Moses to live with them and gave him his daughter named Zipporah to marry.”

“So they were still giving women away like property,” Jimmy observed.

Ignoring his comment, Mrs. Peabody continued, “One day when Moses was eighty years old, he was tending his father-in-law’s flock on a mountain named Horeb, also known as the Mountain of God. Suddenly, Moses noticed a bush that was on fire. When he looked closely at the bush, though, he discovered that, although it was burning, it wasn’t getting burnt up. While he was wondering about this strange event, he heard a voice coming from the fire, saying, ‘Moses! Moses!’

“‘Here I am,’ Moses answered, and the voice continued. ‘I am the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I have heard the suffering of my people in Egypt and am sending you to go to Pharaoh and bring my people out of Egypt to this mountain to worship me. Go tell the Israelites that I have sent you to take them out of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey. Then you will go to Pharaoh and tell him

to let the people go. He will refuse, but then I will strike the Egyptian with many wonders until he agrees to let them go.'

"Moses didn't have the confidence to go to Pharaoh, though, so god told him to throw his staff on the ground. When he did so, the staff turned into a snake. God told him to pick up the snake, and when he did, it turned back into a staff again. God then told him to put his hand inside his cloak, and when he did so, it turned all white. God then told him to put it back in again, it came back out normal. Moses, though, objected that he did not speak well, so god told him to take his brother Aaron with him, who was a good speaker. So Moses agreed to go, and before he left, god said, 'God to Pharaoh and show him the signs I showed you, but I will harden his heart so that he will refuse. Then I will get to show my wonders in Egypt.'"

Mrs. Peabody left out the part where god then tried unsuccessfully to kill Moses, thinking that it would be hard to explain why god would try to kill someone he had just sent to do a job, and even harder to explain why god had failed. Continuing, she said, "So he and Aaron went back to Egypt and showed these miracles to the elders of the people of Israel, and they believed that god had sent them."

Jimmy, ever inquisitive, interrupted with a question. "What do you mean by harden his heart? Did it turn into a rock or something?"

Smiling, Mrs. Peabody responded, "No, Jimmy. That's just an expression that means that Pharaoh became stubborn and wouldn't do as god asked."

"Well, why would god make him stubborn if he wanted him to let the people go?" Jimmy followed up. "Why wouldn't he soften his heart so that he would be more cooperative?"

Trying to keep up her smile, Mrs. Peabody answered, "Well, god wanted to show the Egyptians how powerful he was, and if Pharaoh refused, then it gave him the opportunity to bring about the great wonders that would show that."

"Oh," Jimmy responded, and Mrs. Peabody continued, "Then Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Our god, the god of Israel, says to let the people of Israel go to hold a festival in the wilderness.' But, instead of letting them go, Pharaoh refused and made them work even harder. The Israelites were making bricks for Pharaoh, and they needed to use straw to do so, so when Pharaoh heard Moses and Aaron ask for this, Pharaoh told the taskmasters to stop giving straw to the Israelites, but to make them go gather the straw themselves. They were still required to make the same amount of bricks, though, so the work that they had to do was greatly increased, and when they didn't make their quota, they were whipped. When they complained to Pharaoh because of all the extra work, Pharaoh told them that they must be too idle that they asked to go hold a festival in the wilderness. So then the people of Israel were mad at Moses.

"Moses then went to god and asked him, 'Why have you sent me? All I have done is make the people's condition worse,' but god responded, 'Wait until you see the great wonders that I will perform on your behalf. When Pharaoh sees them all, he will not only let you go, but he will drive you out of the land.'

"So god sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh to ask him again to let the people of Israel go, but Pharaoh refused, so Moses had Aaron throw his rod on the ground, and, like it had done for Moses back in Midian, the rod turned into a snake. Pharaoh, though, asked his magicians to do the same thing, and their rods became snakes, too. But Aaron's snake swallowed up all of the magicians' snakes. Then god hardened Pharaoh's heart, like he said he would, and Pharaoh still didn't agree to let the people of Israel go.

"So, seeing that Pharaoh wouldn't let the people go, god sent Moses back to Pharaoh with the first of ten plagues that he would send upon Egypt to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. 'The god of Israel says to let my people go,' they told Pharaoh, but he refused, so Moses told Aaron to strike the waters of the Nile River, and, when he did so, the river turned to blood, the fish and everything in it

died, the river stank and there was no water to drink. But, once again, Pharaoh told his magicians to do so, and they did the same thing, so his heart was hardened and he still didn't let the people of Israel go."

"But how could Pharaoh's magicians turn the water to blood if it was already blood?" Jimmy asked logically.

"Jimmy, there you are asking lots of questions again," Mrs. Peabody responded. "We aren't told all the details about what happened. We just have to believe that it happened the way god said it happened." Continuing on, she said, "God sent Moses and Aaron back after that with the second plague. 'The god of Israel says to let his people go so that they may serve him,' they told Pharaoh, but Pharaoh still refused to let them go, so Aaron lifted his rod over the water again, and this time frogs came up out of the river and swarmed all over the country of Egypt. Once again, though, Pharaoh's magicians did the same, and Pharaoh once again refused to let the people go, so god sent the third plague.

"You mean the magicians could do god's miracles, too?" Jimmy interrupted. "Did they serve god, too?"

"No, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody answered. "The Egyptians served other gods. They didn't serve the true god?"

"So the other gods could make frogs come out of the water, too, then?"

"No, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody responded. "There aren't any other real gods. They were just the gods that the Egyptians imagined."

"So how did the Egyptians make the frogs come out of the water and do the other miracles that Moses and Aaron were doing?" Jimmy asked.

"It had to be the devil who gave them their power, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody responded. "The devil is a very powerful being also. That's why it's important to trust in god, so that you won't fall into the devil's hands."

"So the devil is a lesser god who doesn't have a much power as our god?" Jimmy continued.

"No, Jimmy," Mrs. Peabody responded with her voice rising. "The devil is not a god. The devil is evil, and he is after each one of us, and it is a good thing that we have god to protect us from him."

"And who will protect us from god?" Jimmy wondered, but kept the question to himself.

"So," Mrs. Peabody continued her story, "for the third plague, Aaron stuck the ground with his rod, the dirt turned into lice, and the lice swarmed through the land of Egypt and infected everyone. This time the magicians tried to do the same, but they could not, and they said, 'This must be the hand of god,' but Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he still would not let them go.

"The next day, Moses and Aaron came back. 'The god of Israel says to let his people go so that they may serve him, or he will send flies to swarm throughout the land of Egypt, except in the land of Goshen where the Israelites are living,' they told Pharaoh, but Pharaoh still refused to let them go, so god sent flies across the land to harass all the Egyptians, but there were no flies where the Israelites lived.

"So why was god making all the Egyptians suffer, if it was only Pharaoh who was disobeying him?" Jimmy asked.

"God did these things," Mrs. Peabody responded, "to show the Egyptians his power so that they would know that he was the true god."

"So god makes other people suffer for one person's sins just so that he can show off?"

Angrily, Mrs. Peabody responded, "That's devil talk, Jimmy. Now stop it!" Then she continued. "Now Pharaoh was getting concerned, so he told Moses, 'Okay, I will let the Israelites go a short distance into the wilderness to worship their god if you will ask him to take these flies away.' Moses then asked god, who removed the flies, but when Pharaoh saw that the flies were gone, his heart was hardened again so that he changed his mind and wouldn't let the people go.

“So why didn’t god leave the flies until after Pharaoh had let the people go?” Jimmy asked. “Then he would have been sure that Pharaoh would follow through.”

“God trusted Pharaoh to be a man of his word, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody answered. “So he gave him the chance to do as he said he would.”

“So god didn’t know that Pharaoh would go back on his word?” Jimmy continued his questioning.

“Yes,” Mrs. Peabody responded, her voice rising again, “of course, god knew. God knows everything. But he gives everybody the chance even if he knows they won’t do right.”

“Oh, I see,” said Jimmy.

“After that,” Mrs. Peabody continued, “god sent Moses to Pharaoh again, saying, ‘The god of Israel says to let his people go so that they may serve him, or he will kill the cattle, sheep, camels and horses of Egypt. Pharaoh still didn’t let them go, so the next day all the cattle of the Egyptians died. None of the Israelites’ cattle died, though. However, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened again, and he still didn’t let the people go.

“Then god said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Take ashes from the furnace and throw them toward heaven and the ashes will become boils that will spread out upon all the Egyptians.’ So Moses and Aaron did so, and everyone in Egypt had sore boils on their bodies. But god hardened Pharaoh’s heart again so that he would not let the people go.

“The next morning god sent Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh, saying, ‘The god of Israel says to let his people go so that they may serve him, or he will send a great pestilence. This is why he raised you up and made you king, to show his great power and that his name would be declared throughout the world. He will send hail so big and heavy that it will kill anything out in the field, so gather your cattle under shelter, because any man or beast out in the field will be killed.’ But Pharaoh didn’t listen to them and left his cattle in the field, and god sent hail mixed with fire which killed everything that wasn’t under cover, except in Goshen, where the Israelites lived. Pharaoh called to Moses and said, ‘I have sinned. Please call upon god to end the hail, and I will let the people go.’ So Moses prayed to god to stop the hail, and god did so, but Pharaoh’s heart was hardened again, and he refused to let the people go.”

“So why did god stop the hail? God had already given Pharaoh a chance, and every time he did so, Pharaoh turned around and reneged.” Jimmy felt proud; he had just learned that word a week or so ago. “God wasn’t being too smart, was he? If I were god, I would have kept the hail going until the people left.”

“Jimmy!” Mrs. Peabody scolded. “That’s the devil speaking again! God is smarter than all of us. He knows everything, from the beginning to the end.” Calming down slightly, she continued, “You remember god said he would harden Pharaoh’s heart so that god could perform all his miracles and show the Egyptians that he was the true god.”

“I’m sorry,” Jimmy said, but inside he was noticing how fun it was to get Mrs. Peabody worked up.

“So god came back to Moses again,” Mrs. Peabody continued, “and said, ‘Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart that I may show my wonders before him and so that you will tell your children the great wonders that I have done and will know that I am the lord.’ So Moses and Aaron went back to Pharaoh again and said, ‘God says, “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me and let my people go to serve me? If you do not let them go I will send locust across your land, and they will eat up whatever is left over from the hail.”’ Locusts are wild grasshoppers that eat up the crops that people depend on for food. Pharaoh refused, though, so god brought locust across the land which devoured everything that was left. Pharaoh called Moses and said, “Okay, I will let the people go if you will call off the locust,’ so he did so, but god hardened Pharaoh’s heart again so that he would not let the people go.

“God’s still not learning,” Jimmy muttered under his breath.

“What was that?” Mrs. Peabody asked.

“Oh, nothing, Mrs. Peabody. Go ahead with your story.”

Continuing, Mrs. Peabody explained, “So god told Moses to lift his hands to the sky and there was darkness over the whole land of Egypt for three days. No one could see anything because of the darkness, except in Goshen where the Israelites lived. Pharaoh said, ‘Okay, your people can go, but your cattle and livestock stay here,’ but Moses said, ‘No. We have to take our livestock so that we can offer sacrifices to our god.’ Pharaoh was angry then and yelled at them, ‘Get out of my sight! If I ever see you again I will kill you,’ and Moses responded, ‘You will never see us again.’

“So god told Moses then that he was going to sent the last plague upon the Egyptians and that then Pharaoh would let the Israelites go free. For the last plague, god said that he was going to go through all the houses of Egypt and strike dead the firstborn son in each house. However, he told Moses...”

“You mean god did all that heart hardening so that he could kill people all over Egypt?” Jimmy interrupted.

“He did it,” Mrs. Peabody responded, “so that he could show his power to the Egyptians and show them that he is the true god.”

“By killing them?” Jimmy continued. “Does god ever do things without killing people? Is that what he lives for?”

“Now, Jimmy. That’s the devil talking again,” Mrs. Peabody scolded him. “And I told you once before, I will not have the devil’s talk interrupting my class!”

Jimmy looked downward penitently, but he just wondered why this Sunday School just loved to teach about a god that was always killing people. “Is this how they get their kicks?” he thought.

“So, anyway,” Mrs. Peabody continued, “god told Moses that he would spare the Israelites from this plague if they would put blood on the door frames of their houses. They were to kill a sheep and smear its blood on the sides and top of the door frames of each of their houses, then eat the sheep along with unleavened bread; that’s bread that doesn’t have any yeast in it. God also told them to borrow valuable items like gold and silver from their Egyptian neighbors to take with them when they left.

“To take with them?” Jimmy asked. “You mean they weren’t going to return what they borrowed.”

“No, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody answered, “God told them to borrow the items so that they could carry off the valuables with them when they left.”

“You mean god told them to steal from the Egyptians?” Jimmy asked.

“No, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody responded, “it’s not stealing when god tells you to do so. You see, Pharaoh was evil and didn’t do as god said. He oppressed god’s people. Everything really belongs to god anyway, so it’s not stealing if god tells you you can have it.”

“Oh good,” Jimmy responded. “I will remember when I get older that if my employer is evil and doesn’t do as god says, then I can take things from him, and it won’t be stealing.”

“Now Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody yelled at him. “That’s the devil speaking again! You are taking god’s stories and twisting them up the wrong way.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Jimmy said. “I’ll try to twist them the right way from now on.”

Gathering herself together, Mrs. Peabody continued. “God further said to the Israelites that when they came to the land that he was taking them to they should commemorate this event each year by putting blood on their door frames and eating lamb with unleavened bread. This would be called the Passover, because god passed over their homes when the death angel went throughout Egypt. So the Israelites did as god said and spread the blood of a lamb on their door frames. Then they ate the lamb and the unleavened bread and got ready. That night god’s angel went through the entire land of Egypt and killed the firstborn son in each house. There wasn’t an Egyptian household that was spared; every one had a dead son.

“Well, now Pharaoh had had enough! When he saw that there was a dead person in every household in Egypt, he decided that he had better do as god said. He called Moses and Aaron to him and ordered the Israelites to leave Egypt.

“In every household?” Jimmy inquired.

“Yes, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody answered. “The Bible tells us that the oldest son was killed in every household of Egypt. This was because the Egyptians were so evil and oppressed god’s people.”

“So god killed people even in the homes that cooperated and gave gold and silver to the Israelites?” Jimmy asked.

“Yes, Jimmy, every home in Egypt,” Mrs. Peabody responded.

“I guess it doesn’t do any good to do what god wants, huh?,” Jimmy asked. “God is gonna get you anyway.”

Mrs. Peabody was red in the face now and screamed, “Jimmy, no more of that devil talk! I won’t have the devil upsetting my classroom.”

Pulling herself together, Mrs. Peabody then continued the Bible story. “And so that day all the Israelites marched out of Egypt—a great host of them. There were 600,000 men alone, plus the women and children, and they marched out of Egypt toward the Red Sea to the east. They took the gold and silver with them.

“How long of a train would that make?” Jimmy asked.

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Peabody answered, “but I don’t want any more inter....”

“Oh hey!” Jimmy responded, “I get to use my new calculator. Let’s see, I think I know how to do this. This is the multiplication key and this is the division key. If the 600,000 men formed a line one after the other with their wives and children next to them, and left ten feet between each one, that would be 600,000 times ten, which would be...” Jimmy punched the buttons on his calculator. “...six million feet. Hmm, how many miles would that be Mrs. Peabody?”

“I don’t know, Jimmy, but...” Mrs. Peabody started to answer, but Jimmy kept on calculating. “How many feet in a mile, Mrs. Peabody.”

“I believe there are 5,280, but...”

“Ah, 5,280. So if I press divide and punch in 5,280, then let’s see... Hmm. That looks like it would be around ... 1,136 miles long. But they had all their flocks and herds with them, right? So I guess it would have been quite a bit longer, huh?” Jimmy asked. “And they all marched out in one day?”

“Well, it was a very long line, I’m sure,” Mrs. Peabody nervously granted and continued, “Leaving Egypt, the Israelites travelled toward the Red Sea. God led them using a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night so that they would go in the right direction. God led them around the land of the Philistines, because they were a warlike people, and god didn’t the Isrealites to be afraid if they came out against them.”

“So they had just watched god kill someone in every house of Egypt, but he thought they would be afraid of the Philistines?” Jimmy asked. “Those Philistines must have been some really bad dudes!”

“Yes, they were bad dudes,” Mrs. Peabody answered, trying to decide if this was devil-talk, and continued, “Then, after they left, Pharaoh changed his mind and decided that he wanted the Israelites back so he could make slaves out of them again, so he sent his army after them and found them camped by the Red Sea.”

“You mean god had just killed people in every single house in the whole land of Egypt, and Pharaoh was going out for more?”

“Yes, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody responded, “He was going out for more.”

“Wow! That Pharaoh was one bad dude, too!” Jimmy said.

Ignoring this comment, Mrs. Peabody continued. “When the Israelites saw the army of Egypt coming, they were afraid, complaining, ‘Why have you brought us out here to die in the desert? It would have been better to serve the Egyptians than to die out here.’”

“But Moses responded, ‘Fear not! Stand still and see the salvation of the lord.’ Then god spoke to Moses, who stretched out his hand over the sea, and the waters miraculously parted away, leaving a path through the middle. The Israelites then entered the sea and crossed through on dry ground to the other side, with the water of the Red Sea like a wall on either side of them. When the Egyptian army saw that the waters had parted, they also entered and tried to cross, but god removed the wheels from their chariots, and this slowed them down, allowing all the Israelites to cross over to the other side. When they got to the other side, god spoke to Moses again, who raised his hand over the sea once more, and the waters returned to their place, drowning the Egyptian army in the middle of the sea. And so god delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians who had enslaved them for 400 years. Isn’t god amazing, children?

“So god doesn’t like slavery?” Jimmy asked.

“No, Jimmy,” Mrs. Peabody responded. “I am sure god doesn’t like slavery.”

“So I guess god didn’t let the Israelites have any slaves, huh?” Jimmy asked.

“We’ll just have to see,” Mrs. Peabody muttered and made a mental note to skip telling the children about the rules god gave the Israelites about their slaves.

“So are there any other questions?” Mrs. Peabody asked the class.

To Mrs. Peabody’s dismay, Jimmy had one last question. “So the devil turned water to blood, turned sticks to snakes and sent frogs, but didn’t kill anybody, but after afflicting people with lice, flies, boils and all kinds of awful plagues, god killed people in every house of Egypt after hardening Pharaoh’s heart to give him the excuse and then drowned a whole army, and you’re telling us that god is the good guy in this story?”