

# Exodus 7

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[ 0 : 00 ] And he said to the people, Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty. Come, let us deal truly with them, lest they multiply and if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Ramses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied, the more they spread abroad, and the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field. And in all their work, they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

This persecution even expands further as we walk into the rest of Exodus. Pharaoh moves to kill children born to Israel. But one infant escapes them.

His mother places him in a basket into the Nile River and Pharaoh's daughter finds him in the river and adopts him as her own. And Moses is raised in Pharaoh's court until he sees the Israelite being oppressed and kills the Egyptian taskmaster and is forced to flee.

[ 1 : 29 ] Now, Moses lives for years in the wilderness before God calls him back to Egypt. He cares for his people and the injustice that they're suffering.

So he chooses Moses as his prophet to stand before Pharaoh and say, Let my people go. In Exodus 3, we hear, The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.

I know their suffering and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of the land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me. I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

And so Moses returns to Egypt and he speaks to God's people and he says this in Exodus 6, I, the Lord, have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians had pulled as slaves and I have remembered my covenant.

[ 2 : 49 ] Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

I will take you to be my people and I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord, your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord. The Lord gives them a sign through Moses, a staff that turns into a serpent, water that turns into blood and a hand that he can miraculously make leprous and then clean again.

They hear his promise for deliverance here and they believe God and they believe his prophet, the one he has sent. They believe this is the God who fights for his people.

But circumstances don't change right away. They remain in slavery. In their immediate future, nothing actually changes except that things get worse.

[ 4 : 08 ] when Moses first goes to Pharaoh, Pharaoh says, why are you complaining? Alright, you must not be working hard enough, so let's give you some more work.

But then, God saves them with a mighty hand just as he ever was. And friends, I think we live kind of in that same moment that the Hebrews did where they have been promised a great deliverance and they have seen the signs of it.

But, in some large respect, their circumstances haven't changed. We are not yet in the heavenly city. We are not yet standing with unveiled faces before the Lord.

So you and I are somewhat like those Israelites who are in that space where the Lord has shown that he will deliver us finally. But we haven't achieved it.

In fact, things might have gotten a little bit worse for us. Our culture raises an eyebrow at Christians, sometimes raises their voices at Christians, and in some places people raise their fists against Christians, right?

[ 5 : 23 ] But, someday, maybe even this day, God will save us with a mighty hand. He is the God who fights for his people. So as we begin to think, and today we're going to be considering the plagues, the first nine of them, next week we will look at the final plague and the Passover.

Let's pray. Father, no eye has seen your glory.

But, Lord, we know that you are a God and acts for those who wait for him. Lord, will you do the very miraculous work of humbling us before your sovereignty at the same time as you lift us up with your love.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Amen. And so that brings us to this morning's sermon. Our text will be mostly in chapter 7, a little bit in chapter 9 of the book of Exodus.

The plagues run, they begin in Exodus 7 and the first nine walk through the end of chapter 10. And reading that aloud is roughly the length of a sermon.

[ 6 : 52 ] And so, I was actually tempted to make that today's sermon, but I chose to spend some time explaining in detail a couple of the points. And so, what we will do today is we will ask the two most important questions I think we can ask about the plagues.

First is, why did God send plagues? What was he accomplishing with them? And then, what kind of response did he get from them?

And how does that impact us? So, first, let's ask why these wonders? Now, there are a total of 11 wonders that the Lord actually produces before Pharaoh.

If we count the beginning of chapter 7, it's not considered a plague, but he does go and sets down the serpent's staff. So, that's an initial sign.

Then there are nine warning signs. Those warning signs don't destroy Egypt. No one is killed. They are severe, but they are not lethal. And then there is finally an act of judgment.

[ 8 : 00 ] So, it goes like this. There's one initial sign that the staff that's turned into a serpent. And then nine signs. The Niles turn to blood. The land is covered with frogs.

The land is covered with gnats. The land is covered with flies. There's a plague on the livestock of Egypt. There are boils on people and animals. There is hail. There is locust and the final warning sign is darkness for three days.

The text says a darkness that can be felt. Finally, there is the Passover. Now, as we approach these wonders, and some of them the text calls plagues, and we have kind of picked up that language, but actually when God talks about them as a group, he calls them wonders or signs. We want to ask ourselves, why? Why does God send this? He's God. He is sovereign. He can do whatever He wants. So he could have changed Pharaoh's mind and people could have walked away.

He could have blinded all of Egypt. He could have just sent darkness and said, be on your way, Israel. He could have moved the earth underneath them if he so chose, and they would have arrived in the promised land in a moment.

[ 9 : 14 ] wonder. Why does he choose to do this? Because he can do anything. So why these wonders? The wonderful thing is that we are not left guessing with God.

He is not, the scriptures say, the author of confusion. And so the Lord is very clear about his purposes in all things, really. And there's no different here today in this passage.

we simply have to look at his word, his unfailing, his clear, his sufficient word of truth to us. We serve a God who speaks, and he's not left us without a guide in this world.

He has spoken through the prophets, through the apostles, through his son, and he has given us that record, faithfully entrusted to us in his word. He has given us his spirit to open our eyes to lead us into the truth that he has placed into our hands.

So we need but open the book and see what he has said. Now we don't have to guess, we can know the mind of God because he has made himself known to us.

[10:23] So why did he choose to rescue his people through mighty signs? Well he explains himself several times actually throughout the narrative. I think most clearly in chapter 9, the Lord commands Moses to tell Pharaoh in chapter 9 verse 14, I will send all my plagues on you yourself and on your servants and your people so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence and you would have been cut off from the earth. but for this purpose I have raised you up to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

God didn't send the plagues to destroy Egypt. That's not what they're for. He says I could have put my hand put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence and you would have been cut off from the earth.

It would have been a simple thing for our Lord. But interesting he sends the plagues as an act of grace.

Certainly it's an act of grace for God's people they get their freedom at the end of it. But it's also an act of grace for the whole world. So this purpose I have raised you up to show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

[12:01] Friends God is the best thing in the entire universe. So when his name is proclaimed that is great grace. The most loving thing we can do to force someone is to teach the name of Jesus.

It's grace to the whole world because we were made in his image. It's grace to the whole world because we were made for covenant fellowship with him. We were made to behold and to praise his glory.

And so we find peace for our souls only when we rest in him. There is salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

So God is being gracious by showing himself. He's showing himself in several ways. First, he's sovereign over all things.

That's probably the most prominent aspect of the plagues. He is sovereign over nature. He can make the sky, he can make the land, he can make the waters do as he wills.

[13:17] And that's why God said, for this purpose I have raised you up to show you my power. He's powerful over the entire land of Egypt, over all the supposed gods, of Egypt.

And so this is at first for us humbling. He's God and there is no other. The universe is upheld by the word of his power.

He has declared the end from the beginning. In him we live and move and have our being. To all who declare their independence from him, he who sits in the heavens laughs.

Psalms 2. And so that's humbling. Nobody looks at the plagues and thinks they're impressive.

They look at the plagues and think God is impressive. And he says, I am even restraining myself. I could have cut you off entirely from the land, but this is me showing restraint.

[14:19] so it is humbling to us, but it is also comforting to us because of the second thing that God is showing to these plagues.

This sovereign Lord is revealing himself as the God who fights for his people when they are powerless. these wonders are not just boasting, they're not just braggadociousness, they are also a rescue mission for people who cannot fight for themselves.

This is a sovereign God who directs his energies at lifting the downtrend, giving hope to the hopeless, judging the wicked, and bringing salvation to the world. So that's the first of our two questions.

Why did God bring plagues? The second question, the one that we need to ask ourselves, is what kind of response is given to God from Pharaoh and then from ourselves?

In the face of all this, Egypt's society was built around worshipping the king, the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh was considered a living god among the pantheon of the Egyptian gods, the many gods of Egypt were thought to rule over individual domains.

[15:42] So there was a god of the Nile, there was a god of basically everything. Egyptologists know of about 1,500 named Egyptian gods. And so they ruled over fertility, the Nile, crops, every facet of Egyptian life.

And Pharaoh believed that he was a god among that pantheon. So when God says to Pharaoh, I'm showing you my power so you will know I am the Lord of heaven and earth, I'm just fighting words.

And God really, really sticks it to Pharaoh. See, the way the plagues are described, they mock Pharaoh.

Ancient Egyptian texts often described Pharaoh's, all of the Pharaoh's, their strong hand, called him the one who destroys enemies with his strong arm.

But the Lord is the one throughout this whole process who calls himself the one with a mighty hand over Pharaoh. In Exodus 3 he says, I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

[17:03] So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it. After that he will let you go. The Pharaohs like to use another expression to talk about their power and God takes it again for himself.

To show how strong they were, many Pharaohs would say they had done something greater than all the things that were in the country since it was founded. But in the plagues it's not Pharaoh who does something that is historically unique.

It's the Lord who's setting up us. Exodus chapter 9 verse 18 Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall such as has never been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.

And so he's taking the words that Pharaoh uses to glorify himself and he says, no. I am the Lord.

God's saying to Pharaoh, you think you're impressive?

Well, I don't. And not only did he use the language that the Pharaohs used to glorify themselves, he used the symbols.

[18:16] And that's actually why we're in chapter 7 today. Finally we're getting to today's sermon text. He took Pharaoh's mask up.

we'll kind of put it that way. The Pharaohs used a serpent symbol called the Uraeus. It's essentially a cobra. If you search for a photo of King Tut's burial mask, you'll see a cobra on his forehead. Here's how the Egyptians talked about their pharaohs with that Uraeus cobra symbol. This is a direct quote from an Egyptian manuscript.

At this time his majesty King Thutmos I became enraged like a leopard. His majesty shot and his first arrow pierced the chest of that foe. Then those enemies turned to flee helpless before his Uraeus that is the cobra the symbol of his power.

A slaughter was made among them. Their dependents were carried off as living captives. You see the Uraeus symbol stood! The very first sign that the Lord works before Pharaoh and before any of the plagues come is a direct attack on Pharaoh's symbol.

[19:33] Look with me. Exodus chapter 7 verses 8 through 12. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, when Pharaoh says to you, prove yourself by working a miracle, then you shall say to Aaron, take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a servant.

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did justice the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants and became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers and they the magicians of Egypt also did the same by their secret arts.

For each man cast out his staff. They became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. that would be like the merchant marine academy showing up at the coast guard academy with a grizzly bear that ate whatever poor third class cadet had to wear the coast guard bear costume.

That is what this is. It is a direct attack on the symbol of his power. It is literally gobbling up his mascot with a paper one. And so this is not just like some impressive sign.

[20:50] Oh, no, this is saying your sign of power is so irrelevant. He ate his mascot.

God is saying, you call yourself a serpent? I eat serpents for breakfast. Let my people go. And that's where these chapters in Exodus begin to connect to you and me.

Because these themes and the plagues, God's sovereignty and the fact that he is actually using that to fight for those who wait on him, those who cannot fight for themselves, that has a direct bearing on every person, doesn't it?

So this sovereign God confronts us and humbles us. That's me deciding to attend the Coast Guard Academy because of my wounded breath.

That's all of us when we're tempted to lash out at someone who confronts us. That's all of us again when we're scared to let our flaws show.

[22:11] That list there, just that short list of all of us in our pride, what is common to that? Self and how we perceive others to think of us.

But not God, that's not on that list, he's not a part of that list. It's when we think of him that we stop thinking of ourselves.

One of my professors at seminary wrote a book called *When People Are Big and God Is Small*. And the title is worth the price of the book, right? Because that is really important.

When people are big, God is small. When God is big, people are in their right spot. Not that they become irrelevant because they are made in his image.

Valuable to be respected and loved and cared for. But people only have their right value in our minds when we are considering the Lord.

[ 23 : 15 ] Because every person you meet is an image bearer. And honestly, every human being is born like Pharaoh, thinking we are God.

That's especially prominent celebrated even in our culture in particular. We live in a moment in time where individualistic self-expression is the paramount virtue.

It's kind of a unique thing in the stage of history. But it's only unique in that it is culturally appropriate these days. Not that it is somehow new in humanity.

But just like Pharaoh, we can't pretend that we're gods when we aren't. Faced with a truly sovereign God who eats our mascots, so to speak.

We owe him obedience. We owe him praise. And that's why sin, worship of self, and ignoring God, is such a big deal.

[ 24 : 29 ] So we are casting that aside just like Pharaoh. We're not as powerful as him. We're just like him. And that's why we need to be in awe of God. And I hope as we consider what he did, all of these plays, that we see something of his majesty.

And we need to be in awe of God also because it helps us. But see, when I'm not playing God in my own life, that's going to help every other relationship I have. Because I'm not going to insist on being God in that relationship.

I don't walk up to my wife and say, serve me. Because I know that I'm not God. Every time that I am tempted in any relationship that I have to make the relationship about myself, I am acting a figure.

That is not what we are called to try. I think there is something some Christianese that we use that I think is a little bit dangerous.

We say we need to make Jesus Lord. He's already Lord. Talk to Pharaoh. Pharaoh didn't need to make Jesus Lord.

[ 25 : 44 ] He needed to submit to the Lord. I think there might just be a subtle difference in the way we talk, but it's so true. He rules and reigns whether we like it or not.

He was Lord over Pharaoh whether Pharaoh liked it or not. That does not need to be something that ends in judgment. It can be something that ends, friends, in salvation because he is the God who fights for his people.

He's not sovereign and distant. He is sovereign and near to those who are hurting him. See, this is not just the story of our Lord coming and putting on a show with how great I am.

It's the Lord coming and saving his people in power. It's also a rescue mission. So he is showing his character. This is the God who fights for his people.

So just like Israel, we need to be humbled, certainly, but we also are waiting on him for deliverance. Psalm 13 says, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

[ 27 : 04 ] Israel probably felt like that at times. So do we. How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him.

Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. friends, we are in that same spot.

The sovereign Lord has shown us that he is powerful to redeem and to rescue.

Christ has conquered the grave. But just like Israel, we are still in a captivity, in a bondage. We are waiting for the last day when he affects the great rescue. Messiah, Christ, risen from the dead, the firstborn of the new creation, comes to fruition for all of God's people.

[ 28 : 13 ] He is waiting because his name has not yet been named across all the earth.

And so, just like he said to Pharaoh, I am doing this to show you my power, that my name may be spoken across the globe. And his mission is not yet complete, and so we wait with joy-filled hearts

because we know the hope we have.

So despair is not natural to the Christian. Grief? Yes. Sorrow? Yes. Frustration? Yes. But despair? We trust in a sovereign God who fights for his people. He said to Moses in Exodus 3, I have surely seen the affliction of my people.

He's the God who sees the affliction of his people. I've seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their task masters.

[ 29 : 31 ] I know their suffering and have come down to deliver that. Friends, this drives us in several directions. First is cry out to God.

He is the God who hears. He is the God who listens. What's more, he says, I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver.

And friends, we know it more today than they did then because our King has come down and he has shared in our sufferings and he has fought for us.

On his cross he won the victory where he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in a beautiful cross.

So friends, we have a sovereign bond. We have a God who works for those who wait on him. And so we say with the hymnals, we don't have hymnals, but we would say with him, this is our father's world.

[ 30 : 55 ] Oh, let us never forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, he is the ruler of God. Friends, wait on him who fights for you.

Let's pray. Lord, we need you. you. we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

But Lord, you came down. You shared, you knew our sufferings. You put rulers and the principalities of this world to open shame in the same way that you did to him.

Father, thank you for sending your son to fight for us. Thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit so that we may live every day in the hope that he has bought for us.

Lord, help us to cry out to you. humble before the sovereign Lord and hopeful knowing that you are the king who does not take from his subjects but fights for them.

[ 32 : 20 ] Father, we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our King, our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen.

The Lord be sovereign, the Lord be healed. In the end.