

EXODUS

תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה

40

Exodus 7:14 - 8:32
The Gods of Egypt

Pray for helms

We are going to Exodus 7 today. Exodus is the story of God coming and revealing Himself to His people in fulfillment of the promises he had made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. He shows Himself to be a faithful God, who hears the cries of his people and who acts on their behalf. So he raises up Moses to lead the people out of Egypt.

And the part of the story that we'll be in for the rest of 2018 begins with a confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh that we read about in chapter 5.

Who Is the Lord?

Exodus 5:1-2 “Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” **2** But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.”

So Pharaoh asks, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey *his* voice?”

Pharaoh was considered to be a god on earth, and the mediator between the gods of the Egyptians and man. So he was considered to be both human and divine. He would have believed in the gods of Egypt, but among people, he was a god.

So when Moses tells him to obey the Lord, Pharaoh has a lot to lose - he would have to have a God that is superior to him, not equal to him - so he would have to bow. And he would have to have a God that wasn't one of the Egyptian gods, he would have to admit that the religion they had all been pursuing was wrong. That's a tough pill to swallow.

The Egyptians were polytheists, and there are records of as many as 2000 different gods worshipped in Egypt. Each god was very local, a god of a specific area, and had a very specialized job description, and you'd go to that god if you had a need that fit in his or her job description.

- They worshipped a god Khnum who guarded the source of the Nile river, which was the source of life in Egypt.
- Hapi was the god of the annual flood and source of the fish.
- They worshipped Heqet, a goddess of fertility with the head of a frog, so they'd offer sacrifices to her if they wanted to become pregnant.
- Geb was the god of the dust of the earth
- Khepri had the head of a bug¹

(1995 more) Isis was the goddess that helped people in the afterlife...

So Moses comes and tells Pharaoh to let the Israelites go to sacrifice to the Lord, and Pharaoh says, "Who's that?" And God now sends Moses to Pharaoh to show him who the LORD is.

And, just by way of explanation, this was originally written in Hebrew, and anytime in the Old Testament you see God's name as the LORD in all caps, it is the Hebrew word Yahweh - YHWH - the name God used for himself at the burning bush. There are no vowels in it, but when we add the vowels and then make an English version of it, it comes out "Jehovah." So Yahweh and Jehovah are the same name, the same word in Hebrew, and it means something like "the one who is."

Lowercase "Lord" is adonai. Which is a more generic word for God. God is called by many different names in scripture, but they are all referring to the same God. We might call him Father or Lord or God - presenting slightly different facets of his character with each name, but referring to the same God.

So Moses comes in and tells Pharaoh that Yahweh says the let the people go.

¹ <https://housetohouse.com/10-plagues-jehovah-god-vs-gods-egypt-info-graphic/>

And Pharaoh says, "Who is this Yahweh?"

He's thinking why do I need to keep Yahweh happy? What does he do? What does he rule over. I've already got plenty of gods to keep happy with my sacrifices. I've gotta keep Osiris happy and Amun-Ra happy, I've gotta keep Hathor happy, I've gotta keep Hapi happy. Now who is this Yahweh? I have to keep him happy too? What does he want? Oh, just to sacrifice my entire labor force and let them leave?

So Pharaoh isn't about to admit inferiority to anyone, he isn't going to sacrifice to the god of the hebrews, and he certainly isn't going to sacrifice his jewish slaves to keep that god happy. After all, if their god was any good, they wouldn't be slaves. I'm not going to bow before their lame god.

Pharaoh doesn't know Him, and the Egyptians don't know Him. They don't have any category for one God who rules over all things, who rules over the fish and the Nile and the dust and the cattle and even over their families. His eyes are not open to who God is at all yet.

And this shows that there are more slaves than just the Jews here: they are a nation enslaved to the whims of their gods, trying constantly to appease them all to keep the crops abundant and the babies healthy and the Nile flowing. They live in the fear and anxiety we always live in when we try to keep a god happy with our religious observances.

But God knows that it's only when we know Him and serve Him and worship Him that we are ever free.

So God is about to free His people from Egypt just like He said He would. But in the process, He is going to make a tremendous, gracious, hope filled offer to the Egyptians, and to us.

In Exodus 6, this was the message God told Moses to take to the Jews:

Exodus 6:6-7 "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. 7 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.'"

God had acted to make himself known to their Jewish fathers, and to the Jews in Moses' day. God makes himself known to His people that He has set His affection on them. But look what God tells Moses to do next:

Exodus 7:14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. 16 And you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed. 17 Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.

Look at the offer made to Pharaoh here: you will know Me. This is the first time in the Bible the offer of knowing God is made to a Gentile. God is making Himself known to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians, and this Nile to blood plague is the first of 10 plagues that come with an offer to Pharaoh: know Me and bow before Me.

And the way God will make Himself known in these plagues is by judging the gods of the Egyptians, by exposing them as false, by showing the Egyptians their gods have no power at all, so they might let go of the gods they are serving and turn to bow before Yahweh, where they would find a God, not that they have to appease with their religion, but a God of grace and mercy, a God who frees them.

So these plagues are going to be tough love from Yahweh - Yahweh will triumph over their gods that they might know the true God, know true freedom, and if He would only bow, Pharaoh could know life for the first time.

In Exodus 12:12, when God is announcing the final plague, He says this:

Exodus 12:12 "For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD."

He's judging the gods of Egypt. He's violently breaking chains here, He's fighting off their captors (the captors of the Jews, and these false gods that are the captors of the Egyptians.) It's a judgement scene for sure, but one filled with hope - this is gonna free some people.

So the first plague that's announced is that the Nile will turn to blood.

Exodus 7:18-21 “The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.” 19 And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.’” 20 Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. 21 And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

And the question would be, “where are the gods of Egypt?” Where is khnum who guarded the source of the river? Where is Hapi the source of the fish? The gods of Egypt are being judged.

So this is a wake-up call to Pharaoh and the Egyptians - bow before Yahweh!

But Pharaoh has an out...

7:22-24 “But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile. 25 Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

So Pharaoh is able to brush this off. He calls his magicians, and through some kind of slight of hand they're able to make some water turn red, too. Probably they did on a small scale what was happening out there, deceptively enough so that Pharaoh could say, “This isn't the work of Yahweh, its the trickery of a magician.”

Besides that, there were some natural phenomena that would make the Nile turn red at times. This wasn't the only time something like this happened. This was far more extreme, and how do you explain even the clean water in pots turning red, but there's enough history to say “we've see this before. It's a purely natural phenomenon.”

Pharaoh has everything to lose. So he's looking for any out he can, he doesn't want to bow before some God as his superior. Pharaoh is king, and he can't have another king.

And this is very similar to what often drives us. We want to remain the kings of our lives, too. We are totally fine with a Jesus that we can pray to in private, that can give us peace, that can fix us psychologically. We are OK with a Jesus that we add to our lives like a trinket or a good luck charm. One more god in our pantheon is no big deal.

But Jesus only comes in to reign. He's not gonna rotate on and off the throne with fifteen other things we've sworn our allegiance to. He reigns. We can't have Jesus in our lives without having Him reign over us. He rules over everything, calls every shot, and rearranges a life around Him and His priorities. But that's where we become very resistant.

We can worship gods who help us and prosper us pretty easily. And if we see Jesus just as a help who will never correct us or change us, He's pretty easy to welcome in to our lives. But if He is king, that will upend our lives. And to that we are very resistant.

Remember, the first Christmas was marked by a man raging against Jesus because he didn't want there to be another king.

Matthew 2:1-3 “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

And he goes on from there to order the massacre of the innocents, babies who were the first Christian martyrs, because Herod couldn't handle anyone else being king. Everybody is OK with a private, spiritual Jesus that we can accept into our hearts along with everything else. But we're all naturally resistant to anyone else ruling over our lives.

So Pharaoh refuses to yield. And he's engaging in some motivated reasoning here. He doesn't want to believe that Yahweh has any claim on his life, so he chooses to believe in an alternative theory. Natural causes, large-scale trickery, whatever alternative explanation there is.

And this happens all the time. We all want to be our own king, do our own thing. And we hear that God has this claim on all of our lives. But we like being king. So we are motivated to find people who will tell us that they don't believe there's evidence God exists at all. That Christianity was invented to oppress us. And those ideas are attractive when we just want to do what we want to do.

Which is why we should be very slow to believe the doubts we have, and quick to ask ourselves what the motivations are for those doubts. Are we living in a sin that is driving our conscience nuts, and we want to get that guilt off of us, so we're motivated to find that there is no God so we can be free? Are we really looking at evidence objectively, or are we seeing what we want to see so we don't have to bow or change? Our reasoning can be motivated against the faith, and we shouldn't trust our doubts.

Exodus 8 “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. 2 But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. 3 The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people,2 and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. 4 The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.” 5 3 And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7 But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

Now frogs. Lots of frogs. And Moses made clear that even great Pharaoh is going to be annoyed by the frogs. They'd come into his house, specifically, his bedroom, his bed, into his mixing bowls. The Egyptians didn't wear shoes indoors.² So imagine the grossness of stepping, barefoot, on frogs in your house. Or going into the kitchen to get a snack and frogs are sliming all over the bowls. And their beds were just mats on the floor³, so all night long, sleeping with no blankets because of the heat, frogs are hopping on you.

This is going to go on for a week, so they'll be without sleep, everything's gross.

So Pharaoh has had enough:

² Ibid. 204.

³ Ibid. 204.

Exodus 8:8 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

Here's some hope! Pharaoh didn't take the blood to heart at all. Here Pharaoh says, "I'll let them go to make their sacrifices if you ask Yahweh to take away the frogs."

He's at least acknowledging that Yahweh exists. Now, He doesn't know Him. Because he refuses to bow before him. He wants Yahweh to be useful and helpful here, Pharaoh is just treating him like a god of Egypt - make that god happy so he takes away the frogs. He isn't yielding, but he is asking Moses to pray.

Exodus 8:9 Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” 10 And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. 11 The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.” 12 So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. 13 And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. 14 And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.

The frogs are all dead stinking up the land! This would have been atrocious. There's no worse smell than dead things, and there are piles of dead frogs all over in the hot Egyptian sun. A couple of years ago, something started smelling dead in my study in my basement at home. And I work in there most days so it was affecting everything. I looked all over and couldn't find it, and I assumed a mouse had died in the wall. It got so bad I was close to hammering out the drywall to find it, but then I looked in a drawer and a mouse had crawled into an empty bottle and died. So cleanup was easy. But that one mouse stunk up everything. These are dead frogs covering the land.

So that goddess of fertility and life, Heqet, with the head of a frog - where was she in this? The land's covered with dead frogs!

8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

This is so true to life. Pharaoh is resistant to God, so God puts pressure on him. The blood, then the frogs and the stink. God is clearly at work, these things are happening on Moses' command. So Pharaoh gets soft-hearted for a second and says, "God I'll do what you want." And then there's respite - the pressure comes off. And Pharaoh goes right back to being himself again.

We do this. We go through a tragedy, we look at our lives and we see what messes our sins have made of them. And we say to God, "I'm done, I quit, I'm repenting, I'm turning back to you!" Or maybe it's a close call on the road, or a close call with a life-altering sin, we are shaken awake and we repent and run to God. We're back in the bible, back in church, waging war against our sin. We are begging Jesus for help, seeking Him in prayer.

But when the emotion wears off, when we get used to the bad circumstances, or when things start to work out better for us, we stop listening. We say, "I'm pretty strong to have made it through that," and turn again from the Lord.

Pharaoh does not want another king here. He's the king. He doesn't want a God that everything in His life has to bow before. So he hardens his stubborn heart against God.

But God is faithful.

Third Plague: Gnats

Exodus 8:16 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'" 17 And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. 18 The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

So Geb, the god of the dust of the earth, is judged by Yahweh. And the magicians can't do this one - they can't train gnats. So they say, "This is God's work." But Pharaoh's heart is hardened.

Next plague: *on the fourth day of Christmas...*

The Fourth Plague: Flies

Exodus 8:20 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me.

So Pharaoh’s going out for a bath again, and here comes Moses again, meeting Pharaoh at the river like he did the first time. He’s thinking, “I hate this guy.” It’s never good news when Moses comes in for a meeting. No way he’s about to tell me that he really appreciates my leadership and he baked me a cake. It’s bad news with this guy - what are we gonna get afflicted with next?

Exodus 8:21 Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. 22 But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. 23 Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.’” 24 And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

So now maybe its Khepri, the god with a bug head, that is judged.

Exodus 8:25 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.” 26 But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? 27 We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God las he tells us.” 28 So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me.” 29 Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” 30 So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. 31 And the LORD did as Moses

asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. 32 But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

Pharaoh just can't accept another king.

But God in his mercy keeps smashing Pharaoh's gods to show him that there is one true God, one with real power, one that can give life, one that controls nature, there is only one God worthy of worship.

And we read this and think how crazy Pharaoh is. You'd think by plague 4, by the flies, he would see that Yahweh is doing this, that Moses is his messenger, that he can't get away from Yahweh. Just give up! Stop trying to be your own LORD. Tap out. This stubbornness isn't helping. The flies ruin the land - it's not like this is working for Pharaoh. This is gonna cost him more than letting the jews go would cost him.

But he just can't accept another king.

So, one by one, god by god, Yahweh is shaking Pharaoh's gods, and with each new plague showing Himself to be superior. He is showing that he would be a better God for Pharaoh. And He is offering Him opportunities to bow and join those jews in knowing the Lord. God would be His savior. It's like Pharaoh has lost his mind.

And we are just like him.

John Calvin said that the heart is like an idol factory - "a perpetual forge of idols." We have 2000 gods that we make as alternatives to God. We live for and find our security in money, in jobs, in relationships, in health, in our plans, in the party, in our kids, in the government, in the church. We wrap our hopes for the future in so many things, and over and over again they disappoint. Or they make so many demands of us that the pursuit of them crushes us. We know Jesus is the fountain of living water but we just keep drinking from toilet after toilet.

And we keep pursuing our pride and nobody can correct us, so we end up alienated from all of our friends, yet we refuse to yield and learn. The problem is everybody else, even though I'm the one common factor in every relationship I've ever had that has gone wrong. We harden our hearts against what God is clearly teaching in our circumstances.

Or we keep pursuing the affair, but then we become the victim of one and become the one cheated on. But still we refuse to repent.

Or we don't pursue thanksgiving and contentment but instead we grumble, and soon we are dissatisfied with every relationship, every job, every church, every institution and we're isolated. But we don't humble ourselves. And it's evident to everyone else: you're mad at every boss, every church, every woman, every guy, every authority - it can't possibly all be all of their fault. But we harden our hearts against God.

But God keeps being faithful to judge our gods. To make them not work for us, to allow us to experience the slavery that it is to live for these gods.

And every recession, every stock market crash, every company that announces layoffs, every relationship that goes south, every doctor's visit that goes badly, every plan that fails, every child that rebels, every hangover, every christmas bonus that turns out to be a one years' subscription to the jelly of the month club, every attempt at utopian church or utopian government. Every politician that disappoints, every celebrity that melts down, every failure of our ambition, every lie we are caught in and sin that's exposed - is a gracious reminder that there's only one true God, there's only one good God, there's only one that doesn't disappoint in the end.

But in doing so, He is making an offer to be a far better God to us than anything else we put our hopes in. Each is an invitation to turn from all the vanity we're pursuing, to stop chasing the wind, and find our rest in Him. And He is faithful to keep judging them and keep calling us to kneel before Him

In the Problem of Pain, CS. Lewis writes, "pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

But there is a more serious warning in these plagues. They progress. They go from bad to worse. They start with some red water, some annoying frogs, some itching gnats, and some destructive flies. But they keep going. In chapters to come they're going to end with total darkness and the death of the firstborn. The lesser plagues are a warning that greater plagues are coming.

And when we commit to sin and it leads to frustration, or it ruins relationship, or it ruins our health, or it leads to anxiety, and loneliness, and isolation, that's certainly bad. But each of those natural consequences for sin is a reminder that there are consequences

for sin, and that they do get worse. And, without redemption, we stand before God one day, and the consequence for sin is that we will be isolated not only from those we alienated here, but isolated from Him, alienated from Him, forever. It what Jesus described as outer darkness, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. There are eternal consequences for our idols.

But the hopeful news in all of this is that the better king came. The true God came. And endured that wrath for us.

Matthew 27 45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus came and endured the darkness. He came as the firstborn of God who died for sin.

So that all who would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

But to believe is to yield to a king.

While there is still a softness and responsiveness in us, we can take all of the small judgments on our sin as a gracious invitation from God to know Him. To worship Him. To bow to only Him as king. And for all who will bow, who will yield, who will refuse to harden our hearts against God and his word and his clear work in our lives to allow us to be disappointed by all of our idols, we will all experience life.

True freedom is found only in humbling ourselves and kneeling before the true king

Lord's supper.

Scriptures Referenced:

Exodus 5:1-2
Exodus 6:6-7
Exodus 7:14-17
Exodus 12:12
Exodus 7:18-21
Exodus 7:22-24
Matthew 2:1-3
Exodus 8:1-7
Exodus 8:8
Exodus 8:9-14
Exodus 8:15
Exodus 8:16-19
Exodus 8:20
Exodus 8:21-24
Exodus 8:25-32
Matthew 25:45-46

Bulletin Notes:

Exodus 7:14 - 8:32
The Gods of Egypt

I. God's Gracious Offer (Exodus 7:14-17)

II. The Nile (Exodus 7:18-25)

III. Frogs (Exodus 8:1-14)

IV. Gnats (Exodus 8:16-19)

V. Flies (Exodus 8:20-32)

For Discussion in Small Groups:

1. What idols do we create and cling to?
2. How are we like Pharaoh in this story?
3. In what ways do our sins and idols make messes in our lives? Why is it God's grace that that's all they do, for now? How are those messes warnings of something worse?
4. What does it mean to harden our hearts? How do we avoid that?