

Exodus 7-11
God vs. Pharaoh

Preamble:

Elder's candidates (Terry and Nick).
Flock Talk (check it out).
Guest reception (who is this for?)
Reminder to read the sermon text in advance.

Prayer: please join me in prayer:

Sermon introduction:

History is littered with epic battles. Consider...

The battle between the mighty Roman Empire and the violent barbarians from the north during the fifth century.

The battle between the mighty Roman Catholic church and the protestant reformers of the 16th century.

The battle between the massive British Empire and the lowly thirteen Colonies during the 18th century.

The battle between the Yankees and the Confederates during the 19th century civil war.

The battle between the allied forces and the evil axis powers during the twentieth century, the world's bloodiest century.

One of the most epic battles of all time took place on the planes of Egypt. This brings us to Exodus 7-11.

Standing on one side were the God's of Egypt and standing on the other side was YHWH, the God of the Hebrews, the God of the Bible, the one true God.

Why did YHWH go to war with the God's of Egypt? To prove one simple fact! To prove that YHWH is the one true God.

If He is the one true God, he must be worshipped by Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the Israelites, and every other person in world history, including you and me.

Sadly, we are just like Pharaoh and the Egyptians, we often refuse to worship the one true God, preferring man made idols—the idols of money, sex, pleasure, ease, comfort, and approval to name a few.

Yet, this story reminds us that YHWH is the one true God. Since he is the one true God, he and he alone must be worshipped. Three points this morning...

God hardens.

God proves.

God teaches.

A little context...

Israel is enslaved to Egypt. Moses and Aaron have already asked mighty Pharaoh to release the Israelites from bondage, and he said no. This brings us to the first point.

First, God hardens (7:1-13)

In verses 1-7, Pharaoh's hardness of heart is predicted!

Exodus 7:1-7 (ESV) — **1** And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. **2** You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. **3** But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, **4** Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. **5** The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." **6** Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. **7** Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh. (who says you can't serve God in old age?)

This is an exceedingly difficult passage. Why? We read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. In fact, we read ten times in the book of Exodus that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). If this is the case, isn't God the author of sin? Isn't he responsible for evil? How can he hold Pharaoh accountable for his actions when he hardened Pharaoh's heart?

Not so fast. At the same time, we read ten times in the book of Exodus that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15).

So, what happened? Did God harden Pharaoh's heart, or did Pharaoh harden his own heart? The answer is, yes!!!

One scholar writes,

"How are we to interpret all this? With humility, would be a good place to start. There is (and always will be) a mystery in holding together the sovereignty of God and human moral responsibility for our own willed choices and actions. Yet we must, without hesitation, insist that the Bible affirms both, frequently and unequivocally, however difficult it is for us to reconcile them in our human logic." (Christopher Wright, 224, Exodus, TSOGBC)

Illustration:

Shouldn't we expect mystery? We are dealing with an unimaginably powerful God. Expand...

Do cats understand the inner workings of an iPhone 15?

Do dogs understand the inner workings of my MacBook pro?

Do cats and dogs understand differential equations?

Of course not. They are cats and dogs. They are not as intelligent as humans.

If the dog said, "wait a minute, I don't understand the software in your device, therefore there is no software designer, or the software is an illusion!!!"

We would all laugh. Why? Because it is incredibly arrogant and presumptuous for a dog to presume that just because he does not understand something, it must not be a reality.

The distance between us and dogs is measurable. The distance between God and us is not. Of course, we should expect mystery in theology.

Application:

Here is the good news. God controls the actions of all people, even evil people like Pharaoh, yet he will hold them accountable on the day of judgment for how they freely acted. This is meant to bring Israel and us tremendous comfort.

In verses 1-7, Pharaoh's hardness of heart is predicted!

In verses 8-13, Pharaoh's hardness of heart is displayed!

Exodus 7:8-13 (ESV) — 8 Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, **9** "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'" **10** So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. **11** Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts.

Did they use demonic powers or trickery. We don't know. But we soon discover that their powers are no match for God's power.

12 For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. **13** *Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.*

Here we see the first signs of Pharaoh's hardened heart.

Please, please, please don't harden your heart like Pharaoh. The more you resist God's call, or the longer you resist God, the harder and harder your heart will become.

We also see a miniature cycle or picture of what is to come in the ten plagues. What do I mean? This episode in verses 1-13 establishes a clear pattern for the ten plagues. (Ryken, Exodus, 203)

In each story we see four steps.

First, the obedience of Moses and Aaron.

Second, God's superior power over Egypt's Gods.

Third, Satanic counterfeits

Fourth, the perpetual hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

But why? Why this cycle and more importantly, why does God harden Pharaoh's heart? This brings us to the next point.

First, God hardens.

Second, God proves (7:14-11:10)

Why the plagues?

Why Pharaoh's hard heart?

God is proving something.

What is God proving? That he is the one true God.

Exodus 7:3-4 (ESV) — 3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, **4** Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment.

Why does God harden Pharaoh's heart? To prove that he is the one true God. This point is made repeatedly as our story unfolds.

Exodus 7:5 (ESV) — 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."

Exodus 7:17 (ESV) — 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.

Exodus 8:10 (ESV) — 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.

Exodus 9:14-16 (ESV) — 14 For this time 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. **15** 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. **16** 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.

Exodus 10:1-2 (ESV) — 1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, **2** and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."

Exodus 11:9 (ESV) — 9 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."

Do you get the point? It is made with a relentless drumbeat.

Have you ever wondered why God did not deliver Israel after one plague? He could have. Moses could have shown up and performed one mighty miracle and Pharaoh could have been blown away, releasing Israel the next day. Instead, God harden Pharaoh's heart, so that Israel and Egypt could see the full manifestation of God's glory.

What does God prove? That he is the one true God.

How specifically does he prove it? The ten plagues.

In Exodus chapter 7-11, we read about the ten plagues that God sent to Egypt. What were they?

The plague of BLOOD (7:14–25)

FROGS (8:1–15)

GNATS (8:16–19)

FLIES (8:20–32)

LIVESTOCK (9:1–7)

BOILS (9:8–12)

HAIL (9:13–35)

LOCUSTS (10:1–20)

DARKNESS (10:21–29)

The death of the firstborn son (11).

Why ten? More specifically, why these ten?

According to one scholar,

“There were about eighty major deities in Egypt, all clustered around three great natural forces of Egyptian life: the Nile River, the land, and the sky.” (Ryken, Exodus, 216)

Another scholar writes,

“The plagues were actually a “declaration of war” against the gods of Egypt (see 12:12).

The Nile River was worshiped as a god since it was their source of life (Deut. 11:10–12), and when Moses turned it into blood, God showed His power over the river.

The goddess Heqt was pictured as a frog, the Egyptian symbol of resurrection. The plague of frogs certainly turned the people against Heqt!

The lice and flies brought defilement to the people—a terrible blow, for Egyptians could not worship their gods unless they were spotlessly clean.

The... cattle were sacred to the Egyptians; Hathor was the “cow-goddess” and Apis was the sacred bull.

The gods and goddesses that controlled health and safety were attacked in the plagues of boils, hail, and locusts.

The plague of darkness was the most serious, since Egypt worshiped the sun god, Ra, the chief of the gods. When the sun was blotted out for three days, it meant that YHWH had conquered Ra.

The final plague (the death of the firstborn) conquered Meskhemit the goddess of birth, and Hathor, her companion, both of whom were supposed to watch over the firstborn. All these plagues made it clear that YHWH was the one true God! (Wiersbe, Exodus 5-10)

Illustration:

Getting hives/boils the summer of my sophomore year of high school while working in Pullman.

These plagues made life utterly miserable for the Egyptians.

They destroyed nearly everything.

Over the years some have argued that the plagues can be explained away as natural disasters (e.g., red silt washed into the Nile River, starting a domino effect on Egypt's ecology). But the context of the story and the nature of the plagues clearly indicate that these were supernatural events. And why is this hard to believe if God exists?

Why did all of this happen? Why so much destruction and devastation? All of this was to prove that YHWH is the one true God. But what does that mean for us today? This brings us to the third point.

First, God hardens.

Second, God proves.

Third, God teaches.

What does God teach us through the plagues? Several lessons. For starters...

We learn that YHWH is the one true God!

According to one scholar, Pharaoh was way ahead of his time. He was a postmodern man. He had no problem believing in God. He was a spiritual person.

Furthermore, he did not care that Israel had their own God. Good for them. He had no problem with their spirituality. He was a thorough going card carrying pluralist. The more Gods the better.

What really irked him was Israel's exclusivism. He did not like the fact that the Israelites claimed that their God was not merely the God of the Israelites, he was God over all. Therefore, everyone, everywhere must bow down and worship him. Pharaoh did not want Israel to impose their beliefs on him.

In light of this one scholar writes,

“The nine plagues systematically undermine Egypt's pluralist claims. They are a lecture against religious pluralism—the belief that all religions are valid—and personal autonomy—the belief that I have the right to live how I like. It is a curriculum with ten unforgettable lessons. And the message is clear: there is only one God.” (Chester, Exodus, Ch. 7-11)

This is exactly what we face today. Most people have no problem with Christianity if Christians keep their beliefs to themselves. Someone recently said to me, “I don't go to church, but I'm glad that Christianity helps people.”

But Jesus claims so much more. He claims to be the one true God, just like YHWH claimed to be the one true God. The only God worthy of worship. If he is the one true God, he must be worshipped by everyone everywhere, including you and me.

Making this known today will be costly. Just like it was potentially very costly for Moses. It will require courage.

Here is the good news—God gives courage to those who ask.

If YHWH is the one true God, then we must forsake idols, which brings us to the next lesson.

We learn that YHWH is the one true God. In addition...

We learn that YHWH does not tolerate idols.

The Egyptians worshipped false Gods, the idols of their culture. As a result, God judged them. Sadly, Israel did not escape the idolatry of Egypt. We learn later, in the book of Joshua, that Israel brought the false Gods of Egypt into the promised land (Josh 24:14).

God was not pleased. Here is what God says about idols!

Isaiah 42:8 (ESV) — 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

At this point, some of you are thinking, “I’m off the hook. I don’t worship idols. It is not like there are statues of false Gods in my closet.”

Not so fast. An idol is anything we love more than God.

Our cultures idols are ease, comfort, entertainment, health, sports, sex, kids sports, money, career success, politics, and so much more.

Here are some questions that we can ask ourselves to root out the idolatry in our own hearts.

What do we want, desire, crave, lust, and wish for?

Where do we bank our hopes? Retirement, a political party, grandkids, bank accounts.

What do we really fear?

In his excellent article titled X-ray questions, David Powlison writes,

“Sinful fears invert cravings. If I want to avoid something at all costs—loss of reputation, loss of control, poverty, ill health, rejection, etc.—I am ruled by a lustful fear.” (Powlison, X-Ray questions, page 3)

What do we organize our lives around?

What do we feel entitled to?

When stressed where do you turn? In other words, what is our refuge? TV, food, video games, alcohol, porn, antique collecting, sci-fi novels, working out at the gym, etc...

Where do we go to find safety, comfort, escape, pleasure, and security?

What do you most often daydream about? This could reveal an idol.

How do you spend your discretionary time and money?

What are you if onlys?

Where do you find your identity?

What gives your life meaning?

Here is where it gets tricky. Many good things can become idols. God has given us many things to enjoy. And we should enjoy them. They are meant to point us to his goodness. But we often receive the gift and ignore the giver.

How do we know if we are committing idolatry? When we are utterly devastated or crushed after we have lost something. Nothing should devastate or crush us if we have Jesus.

Illustration:

Roughly twenty years ago, I had two friends who were severely depressed, one suicidal. What was the root cause? Fear of man...

Once we identify our idols, we must repent and ask God for forgiveness and grace. We need God's power to do this, which brings us to the next lesson.

*We learn that YHWH is the one true God.
We learn that YHWH does not tolerate idols.*

We learn that YHWH is all-powerful.

One scholar writes,

“As YHWH unleashes each plague, He marshals the powers of creation against Pharaoh, using “weapons” that only the Creator can use. YHWH alone is the Creator God.” (Chester, Exodus, Ch. 7-11)

Furthermore, with each plague, there came an increasing demonstration of the power of God.

God's power displayed in the plagues was meant to encourage the Israelites and us. We serve a God with unlimited power. He is omnipotent, which means that he has all power. We need his power. Don't we? He provides...

Power to turn from idols.
Power to heal.
Power to embolden.
Power to serve.
Power to humble ourselves.
Power to trust him.
Power to be content.
Power to overcome addictions.

How do we tap into this power? We pray!!!

Sadly, we often don't rely on his power. Is there any hope for us? This brings us to the last lesson.

*We learn that YHWH is the one true God.
We learn that YHWH does not tolerate idols.
We learn that YHWH is all-powerful. Finally...*

We learn that YHWH brings salvation through judgment.

Theologian James Hamilton Jr. argues in his book titled “God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgement” that in the Bible, God constantly glorifies himself, as he brings salvation through judgment. In fact, Hamilton argues that this theme is in every book of the Bible.

The story of the plagues is a great illustration of this profound principle. All that God does he does for his glory. He is most glorified when he brings salvation through judgment. Salvation and judgement bring out the fullness and complexity of God’s glory.

In this story, God saves his people, as he judges their enemies.
Said another way, as he judges Egypt, through the plagues, Israel is saved.

This pattern happens again, and again, and again in Scripture. Why? it is meant to point us to the supreme act of salvation through judgment.

On the cross God the father judges his own son. In judging his own son in our place, God brings salvation to billions of people.

On the cross Jesus experienced all the judgment that you and I deserve, so that we could be forgiven, cleansed, adopted, and reconciled to God.

Christ’s death on the cross secures salvation through judgment for idolators like you and me. When feeling convicted about the idolatry in our lives, we can look to the one who was judged in our place.

Conclusion:

Exodus 7-11 is the story of an epic battle.

YHWH verses the God’s of Egypt.

YHWH prevailed in spectacular fashion, since he is the only true God, and there is no other. Every other God is a demonic counterfeit.

As a result, he is worthy of all worship, which means that he is worthy of your worship.

Let’s pray...