

Exodus 7:8-10:29

Study Outline

Launching question

'Thank goodness the OT God became the NT God. The God Jesus taught about is a God of love.' Do you agree, or disagree? why?

Recap

Glancing back through 6:2-9, ask:

- who is God (according to himself)?
- why will he rescue Israel?
- why is this rescuing so important to God?

God, judgment and salvation

Use the table (see insert), dividing plagues between individs / small groups. Put a tick in any relevant column; jot down noteworthy bits in final column. Pool information on a group 'master' table.

Why do you think Egypt's magicians only feature in the first three plagues?

Why does God send the plagues? ... since only the last plague results in Israel being saved, why does God bother with the first nine?

What do these plagues tell us about God ...

- (a) as Judge? (cf 6:6; 7:4; 12:12) how is this judging Egypt?
- and (b) as Saviour? (cf 14:13-14; 15:2) why does God separate out the Israelites (cf 11:7b)?

What knowledge of God would we lack if these chapters were cut out?

What do you think a hardened heart is?

Read Romans 9:14-18

Paul is answering the question: 'is God unjust?' Do you think he is?

What 'purpose' (Rom 9:17) is served in hardening Pharaoh's heart?

How does the exodus proclaim God's name to the world (as in Rom 9:15)?

What sort of God?

What words describe the God in these chapters? is he 'a God of love'?

Do you find this passage, and this God, comforting or scary?

Could you tell a non-Christian this story? what would make it difficult?

Why do you think God wants to make himself known?

God's aim in all this is so that he is known as the LORD (eg 7:4-5) in order that he is worshipped for the God he has shown himself to be (eg 10:1-2): what does it mean to worship God as judge? and as saviour?

If God wants forever to be known as the God who saves people (from Egypt, from his judgment), how might that affect what we think (our) life is about?

Alternative outline

If you would prefer a more verse-by-verse study, a good passage to choose is **9:13-35** (or 9:13-10:2). Still use Roms 9:14-18 as a vital cross-reference.

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Study 4

THE GOD WHO SHOWS HIS POWER

Summary

Exodus is the story of God showing us what he is like: he is the God who rescues his people. He does this in faithfulness to his promises, for his own glory, and out of sheer mercy and kindness to those he has chosen. We should expect to know our God better through reading this book.

The story so far

In Gen 12:1-3, God promises to undo the effects of the Fall, and to establish his good purposes for humankind which were made plain in Gen 1-2. He promises **blessing**, the opposite of the 'curse' of Gen 3:14, 17; a **great nation** (compare Ex 1:7 *fruitful ... multiplied ... filled* with Genesis 1:28 *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*) re-establishing human society after the scattering and division of Gen 11:1-9; and **land**, a place where the life of blessing may again be enjoyed (ultimately in heaven cf Hebrews 11:16).

But God's purposes are being opposed by Pharaoh. He actively tried to stop God's people multiplying and becoming the strong nation God intended (1:10, 22). He also wants to stop them journeying to the land (7:3-5).

More critically than just disliking one nation, Pharaoh's attitude to God is to question his identity and his authority (15:2), proudly hardening his heart against God's purposes to save the world. Just as God promised to bless those who bless Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:3 cf Exod 1:20a, 21), so he promised to curse those who dishonour Israel. This is why God must 'stretch out his hand against Egypt' and bring his people out with 'great acts of judgment' (7:4-5). The stage is set for one almighty clash!

Theme Sentence

In the plagues, God shows his unique power: he is judge and saviour.

Ideas for application

- God is far bigger than we tend to think ... more powerful, more righteous, more patient, more merciful: we need to enlarge our view.
- We will better understand the preciousness of our salvation alongside the awfulness of God's judgment: heaven rejoices in both. We can follow Romans 11:22 and 'consider (both) the kindness and severity of God' as we meditate on the character of God through these chapters.
- How kind God is towards those who have hardened their hearts against him; this should give us confidence about God's patience towards 'long-term' non-Christians that we know. And how brilliant he is to include human rebellion in his salvation plans (cf Acts 4:27-28).

Commentary

• GOD MADE KNOWN

God's identity is at the heart of Exodus (cf 3:14-22; 6:2-9, esp v3): *who he is* made clear by *what he does*. It shouldn't be surprise us to learn that God raised up Pharaoh and sent the plagues to show us what he's like (9:14-16).

Soon all Egypt (7:5), all Israel (6:6-7), all the world (9:16) and for all ages (3:15) will know him. Some references link this specifically to the plagues, for Israel (10:2), the Egyptians (14:4), and other nations (cf Josh 2:8-13).

The repeated emphasis on Israel being allowed to leave Egypt to worship God (eg 10:8-11) makes clear the right response to this God now known.

• THE PLAGUES AS ACTS OF GOD

There are various ways of organising the plagues. But the fact that the account is so highly structured indicates that these are not random acts of nature: it is all God's plan to reveal himself this way. His rule is as evident in Exod 8-11 (using the created world against those who oppose his purpose) as in the ordering in Gen 1 (bringing the created world into being).

The first nine plagues can be organised into three triplets. In each triplet, Moses presents himself to Pharaoh first in the morning by the Nile (7:15; 8:20; 9:13), then at the palace to warn him (8:1; 9:1; 10:1), but the third plague each time has no warning (8:16; 9:8; 10:21).

The theme of the first triplet (blood, frogs, gnats) is God's superiority over the court magicians (7:22; 8:7, 18). This is introduced in 7:8-13 where the word 'serpent' is used in the ancient world for a mythical force of immense power/chaos (eg Gen 1:21), and elsewhere in Scripture for Pharaoh himself (eg Ezek 29:3); a snake sat Pharaoh's crown. So the point of the story is 7:12b – there is is obvious power in Egypt, but look who is even stronger!

A theme of the second triplet (insects, pestilence, boils) is God's control as he separates Israel from Egypt (8:20-24; 9:4-7; and cf 10:23): 'the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel' (11:7b). This is extended subsequently to anyone who 'feared the word of the Lord' (9:20-21).

The final three-some (hail, locusts, darkness) emphasises the uniqueness of God (9:14, noted in 9:18, 24; 10:6; 10:14): it's never been like this before!

• THE PLAGUES AS GOD'S JUDGMENT

The word translated 'plague' is literally 'blow' or 'stroke' (cf 8:2; 9:3). Each plague is God's blow or stroke, his 'great acts of judgment' against Egypt (6:6; 7:4): he punishes disobedience.

All the plagues demonstrate the Lord's superior might over Egypt and its gods: the Nile was sacred but is now turned to blood, frogs were a fertility symbol that God alone can drive away, the land that worshipped the sun

was plunged into darkness, etc. Whether or not similar links can be made for all nine plagues, the point is clear: the Lord 'will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord' (12:12). This is how God 'ruins' (10:7) and 'deals harshly' (10:2) with Egypt, until they were glad to see Israel go.

• THE PLAGUES AS GOD'S SALVATION

These acts of God's judgment work the salvation of Israel. It's always true that God's judgment occurs alongside his salvation because his judgment is the thing from which we need salvation (cf Isaiah 35:4; Rom 3:21-26). The 'big picture' of this story is that God will 'bring out ... deliver ... redeem' Israel (6:6): he is revealing himself as the Lord who saves them.

It is vital that Israel understands her salvation is all the Lord's doing (14:13-14). Israel is delivered not by guerrilla warfare, nor by superior strength or numbers, nor by a charismatic leader, but by God's power and grace: 'he has become my salvation' (15:2). Indeed, God took Israel into slavery (Gen 15:13-15), so that 'out of Egypt I called my son' (Hosea 11:1).

• PHARAOH'S HARDENED HEART

Pharaoh persistently refused to do what God commanded. Sometimes God hardened his heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1) and sometimes he hardened his own heart (8:15; 9:34). In 9:34-10:1, it is spoken of in three ways: Pharaoh hardened his heart, the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and the Lord said 'I have hardened his heart'. There is no doubt that Pharaoh's hard heart is deliberate, something for which he is culpable. But at the same time, the Bible can assert that God is no less sovereign (cf Rom 9:14-18).

In Romans 9:14-18, Paul is answering the question: is God unfair? why are only some people chosen? Paul's answer is that fairness isn't the issue ... the 'just' thing would be for everyone to be condemned (as Romans has proved cf 3:9-20, 23). So whenever God does instead show mercy (defined as 'relief for undeserving sinners so that we're not condemned as we deserve'), it must be because it serves his purpose, not because he has to.

He gives two examples of this point. First, look at how God showed himself to Moses (in Exod 33:19): even then, straight after the incident with the golden calf when Israel's destruction was totally deserved, God had mercy, not for any reason except his own free choice. His second example is Pharaoh. Here is someone that God chose not to have mercy on because it served his purpose. As Pharaoh continually opposed God and refused to let the Israelites go, God could, with impunity, have destroyed him and all of Egypt instantly, but instead he had raised up Pharaoh so that he may show his power and proclaim his name to the whole world, as indeed he does, through the plagues and his destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Exodus: it is made plain to everyone that Israel's deliverance wasn't her doing (16).

It is therefore worth pondering why God keeps sending a plague rather than destroying Egypt (or even just their first-born sons): is this not a mercy? At each point, he exercises restraint so he may display his power for all to see.

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PLAGUE	PASSAGE	MAGICIANS	HARDNESS OF HEART	PHARAOH SOFTENS	ISRAEL SEPARATED FROM EGYPT	GOD-FEARERS SEPARATED	PLUNDERING EGYPTIANS	THINGS TO NOTE
blood	7:14-24							
frogs	8:1-15							
gnats	8:16-19							
insects	8:20-32							
livestock	9:1-7							
boils	9:8-12							
hail	9:13-35							
locusts	10:1-20							
darkness	10:21-29							

Adapted from Andrew Reid: *Out of Darkness* (2005, Matthias Media)
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