

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Exodus 7:1-8:19 (read 7:1-7) “Our God Is Greater”

Intro. We all like to watch a good contest between two rivals. College football is just about to begin. Many are looking forward to seeing Virginia vs. Virginia Tech, or Alabama vs. Auburn, or Georgia vs. Georgia Tech. Or think of *your* favorite college rivals. Well in our study of Exodus, we have come to the beginning of a major contest between Pharaoh and his forces, and the one true God working through Moses & Aaron. At this time in history Egypt was probably the most powerful & advanced nation on earth. Pharaoh was the most powerful man on earth; or so it seemed. In chapters 5 & 6 it seemed that Pharaoh was winning. When Moses told him to let God’s people go, he flexed his muscles and oppressed God’s people even more. They had to produce more bricks and find their own straw. So they became utterly discouraged. Even their spiritual leaders, Moses and Aaron, felt inadequate and fearful. Moses and the Israelites may have been panicking, but God is steady and sure. He was still on the throne, and God was about to work a mighty victory on their behalf. Their weakness only made it more evident that their deliverance & victory was wholly of the Lord.

Are there times in your life when you feel like you are defeated? Are there times when it seems the devil is winning, and God is nowhere to be found? Well I hope to have an encouraging word for you today from this text of Scripture.

Up to this point in their confrontation with Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron had simply delivered God’s ultimatum. Now the time had come for them to reveal God’s power by performing the miraculous signs that proved they were truly sent by God. The gauntlet is thrown down, and now there is open war between the Almighty and the Egyptians. A thrilling drama unfolds to our view.

By the time this message is over I want you to see that indeed God is greater than Satan. He is greater than any king. He is greater than any government. He is greater than any problem you face. We will also see that the Lord our God is sovereign, and He is to be worshipped and obeyed. So is God indeed greater? This will be decided by a contest between God and the Egyptian forces that stand up to resist His will. So let’s see first of all:

## I. HOW THE CONTEST UNFOLDS

Let’s follow the story of the contest between God and His representatives, and Pharaoh and his gods and sorcerers. God could have battled Pharaoh & Egypt with angelic forces, or even with the armies of other nations. Instead, He chose to fight with weapons that no one but He can command, and that’s creation. We start of in v.10 with:

A. The Contest of the Staff – God knew that Pharaoh would demand some proof that the God of Israel had sent Moses & Aaron. So He gave them the first proof to perform. Notice what happened in the last of v.10, “And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Usually, the word translated “serpent” (*tanniyn*) is translated “dragon,” and therefore some believe it became a crocodile. The Egyptians worshiped the crocodile, and Sebak was a deity of evil with a crocodile head. But the word

Now it's Pharaoh's turn. He says to himself, "Ah, that's nothing. My sorcerers can do that!" So we read in vv.11-12, "But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers;<sup>2</sup> so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents...." I can imagine that Pharaoh and his sorcerers had a look of smug and prideful satisfaction. They may have started to sing the song, "Anything you can do we can do better" (tune from *South Pacific* musical). Now I believe these were miracles inspired by Satan, not just tricks. The text says, "they *became* serpents." That's pretty straightforward. Satan can empower his people to perform "lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9-10; Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:11-15), and that may have been the source of their power. Don't be deceived by modern miracle workers. Miracles alone are no endorsement from God.

Ah, but the contest has just begun. For notice what happened next, according to the last of v.12, "But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." The Hebrew word translated "swallowed" (*bala*) is used in Exodus only here and in 15:12, where the sea swallows up the Egyptian armies. Thus, the final demise of the Egyptians is already hinted at in v.12. Now when Aaron's serpent swallowed up the others, God demonstrated His overwhelming power. Even though His serpent was outnumbered, it gained complete & total victory.

What made this demonstration of power significant was the fact that the serpent was one of the special creatures in Egyptian religion, particularly the cobra, which was a symbol of immortality. The pharaonic headdress, so famous from the images of [King Tut's coffin](#), has one or two cobras. For Aaron's staff to turn into a snake is nothing less than a direct challenge to Pharaoh's power. This was just the first of several plagues that used the very creatures worshipped by the Egyptians. The miracles and plagues were God's way of judging the gods of Egypt and proving them false and futile. In fact, in chapter 12, v.12 God said, "against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD" (cf. 18:11; Num. 33:4). More than eighty different deities were worshiped in Egypt but they could do nothing to deliver the land and the people from the terrible judgments the Lord God sent.

In spite of the evidence of God's superior power, Pharaoh refused to let God's people go. This gave the Lord an opportunity to give more signs and wonders demonstrating His power. So we move on to the second contest between God and the power of Egypt & their gods:

B. The Contest of the Water – Though Moses God issues the challenge in v.17, "Thus says the LORD: 'By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood.'" Now let's see what happened. In vv.20-21 we read, "And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the LORD commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.<sup>3</sup> The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the

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can be translated "serpent," and since it was derived from a rod or staff, it seems likely that "snake" or "serpent" is correct. Also, the word more commonly used for "serpent" (*nachash*) was used in 4:3, where this incident is predicted. This may simply be a case of a biblical writer modifying his terms for the sake of aesthetic appeal. Such practice is common in all literature.

<sup>2</sup> Paul even named two of the court magicians: "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth" (2 Tim. 3:8, NIV).

<sup>3</sup> A naturalistic explanation does not do justice to the theological thrust of this passage. Were this merely a natural phenomenon, Pharaoh could simply have countered, "But this happens all the time, Moses." Or why would he even bother to get his sorcerers to duplicate the miracle? There was more here than red sediment pouring into the Nile [Enns].

water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.” The Egyptians viewed the Nile as the source of life. It was closely identified with Hapi & Isis, Egyptian deities. Its waters were held as sacred as is the Ganges by the Hindus. But God turned their life-giving waters into a common symbol of death. What had been a blessing in Egypt is now a curse. Furthermore, it is fitting that the Nile became a symbol of death for the Egyptians, for they had used the Nile to kill Hebrew baby boys years before! Another striking fact about this plague was how extensive it was. More than the Nile was affected. There was blood everywhere. In fact, God said in the last of v.19, “And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *buckets of wood* and *pitchers of stone*.”<sup>4</sup> Even the water in the storage vessels turned to blood. According to v.25, this plague lasted for 7 days. The plague on the Nile was the first toll of the bell that signaled Egypt’s demise.

Once again, Pharaoh turned to his sorcerers. He wanted them to show that they could perform the same feat. So we read in v.22, “Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments....” Where did they get their pure water? V.24 probably gives the answer. They dug & obtained some from ground water. Somehow they were able to turn their water into blood. Once again, the best they can do is imitate God’s miracle. Satan is that way. He is the great counterfeiter. Satan has an imitation gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), a counterfeit righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3), and even counterfeit ministers who spread his lies (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Satan will one day produce a false Christ who will deceive the whole world (2 Thess. 2:1-12). What would have been a more significant miracle was to reverse the plague, & turn the bloody waters back to clean, life-giving water once again. But they could not do that!

Listen, don’t accept Satan’s counterfeits. Sinful pleasure is his counterfeit joy. Lust is his counterfeit love. False religion is a counterfeit of the true.

Once again, Pharaoh hardened his heart & refused to let God’s people go. So this gave God the opportunity to do another miracle before the Egyptians. Now let’s observe:

C. The Contest of the Frogs – God spoke through Moses giving Pharaoh another ultimatum, and another warning. He said beginning in the last of v.1, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all your territory with frogs. So the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into your house, into your bedroom, on your bed, into the houses of your servants, on your people, into your ovens, and into your kneading bowls.” Evidently Pharaoh didn’t budge, so God gave the order to Aaron to stretch out his rod over the rivers, streams, & ponds, and cause frogs to come forth abundantly. Then, there were slimy, ugly frogs everywhere, just as God had warned. Wherever you walk, you stepped on frogs. They even invaded the homes. When you sat down, you would have a nice surprise, or you would have to move frogs out of the way. When you pulled down the covers of your bed, you would find frogs in your bed. They were in every nook and cranny. Ladies, if you were living then, you would pull out a mixing bowl, and you would probably find a frog or two there, and probably scream!

This miracle was another judgment against one of the gods of Egypt. In Egypt, the goddess of fertility and childbirth (Heqet or Heka) had the head of a frog. They were probably hesitant to kill the annoying frogs for this reason.

Now it was Pharaoh’s turn again. He called upon his sorcerers to do something similar. We read in v.7, “And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs on the land of Egypt.” What’s really strange about this is the fact that they just made the problem

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<sup>4</sup> The translator’s interpretation is probably correct. It is unlikely the blood seeped out of wood & stone.

worse! It would have been a better miracle to get rid of the frogs! But they evidently couldn't do that. Once again, God won the contest. He is greater, though Satan's sorcerers could imitate the miracle to some degree.

So now, the frog problem was even worse, and Pharaoh couldn't stand it any more. Perhaps the frogs were getting to Mrs. Pharaoh. So he said to Moses & Aaron in v.8, "Entreat the LORD that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD." He acknowledges that only the Lord God has the power to get rid of the frogs. This gives the Lord another opportunity to display His power. Moses gives Pharaoh the opportunity to name the time the frogs will depart (v.9). It happened just as Moses predicted (v.13). Note that in the plagues narrative, the cessation of the plagues is as much a sign of God's power as the plagues themselves. But God's judgment of the frogs was not completely over. God got rid of the frogs by killing them. Now there were dead frogs everywhere. So we read in v.14, "They gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank." The smell of death filled the land, an ongoing reminder of God's judgment upon sin.

As soon as there was relief from the frogs, Pharaoh broke his promise, and refused to let God's people go. This gave God another opportunity to manifest His power. This led to:

D. The Contest of the Lice – In v.16 the LORD told Moses to tell Aaron, "Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt."<sup>5</sup> The dust of the ground suddenly sprang into life by the creative hand of God, assuming the most disgusting and annoying form. The word "lice" (*ken*) could also mean gnats or mosquitoes. Its root means to "take root" or "fasten." The Hebrew word is only used in reference to insects in the Exodus story.

Once again, the problem was very extensive. Except where irrigation takes place, there is dust everywhere in Egypt. It is a dry, arid country. So when Aaron struck the dust, God miraculously turned "all" of the dust into lice, which infested both man and beast. There were lice everywhere. Your dog was infested with lice. Lice infested your hair, and probably other parts of your body. No matter how hard you tried, you could not get rid of the lice.

The fact that the desert dust became gnats was a judgment against Set, the Egyptian god of the desert. Furthermore, this judgment may have been especially directed against the Egyptian priests. They were so meticulous about cleanliness that they shaved their heads every 3 days. Now, they were infested with lice all over their bodies, and they were defiled. They could not approach their altars, & perform their rituals. Once again, their gods could do nothing to deliver them!

Once again Pharaoh turned to his sorcerers. God had shown His creative power. Let them show what they can do. Ah, but this time, they were powerless. We read in v.18, "Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not...."<sup>6</sup> They could not duplicate the miracle, nor could they get rid of the lice. So notice what they said to Pharaoh in v.19, "This is the finger of God." Jesus may have alluded to this verse when He said in Luke 11:20, "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." How strong is your finger compared to the strength of your thigh? It is much weaker. Yet even God's "finger," so to speak, is more powerful than we can imagine!

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<sup>5</sup> Notice that Pharaoh received no warning prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> plague. He had failed to heed the previous 2 warnings. No warning was given prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, & 9<sup>th</sup> plagues.

<sup>6</sup> Again, if they were exhibiting slight-of-hand tricks it would have been far simpler to substitute lice for dust, than it would be to substitute serpents for rods [Pink, 61].

The contest should be over. Even the sorcerers acknowledged the superior power of God. God is the victor. Yet Pharaoh resists the obvious conclusion that he is no match for the God of Israel. He should concede victory to the Lord, but his prideful and obstinate heart keeps him from doing so. The Lord predicted that he would harden his heart & refuse to yield. You see, He's not only all-powerful, but He is also all-knowing. He knows what's in the heart of man (see 7:4, 9a, 13b, 22b). Because of Pharaoh's rebellious pride, and because God judged him by hardening his heart, it would take 6 more plagues before Pharaoh would finally let God's people go. God desired to keep him pinned against the ropes long after the bell should have sounded. Then, by the time the dust of the conflict had settled, there was no doubt but that the Lord God of Israel is the one true God.

We have seen how the contest unfolds. Now let's see:

## II. HOW THE CONTEST IMPACTS US

This is a great, dramatic story, but what does it teach us? How does it apply to us today? We discover the answers as we consider what God was seeking to accomplish through this demonstration of His power. I will conclude the message by mentioning 4 lessons:

A. God Reveals His Power that We May Know Him – This is emphasized many times in this text and elsewhere. Look back to chapter 7, v.5, “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” The phrase “stretch out My hand” is symbolic of power. Notice that He wanted “the Egyptians [to] know that ‘I am the LORD’” The God of Israel is the one true God, the God of all nations. He wants all nations to know Him. Furthermore, God said to Pharaoh in v.17, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD.” In chapter 8, v.10 Moses said to Pharaoh, “that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.” At least 4 other times God makes similar statements in the Exodus story (8:22; 9:14; 9:29; 10:2; cf. also 9:16; 11:7). Pharaoh had asked back in chapter 5, v.2, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” Since he did not know the Lord, we are not surprised that he did not obey His voice. But now he has no excuse. The Lord gave him more than enough evidence to convince him that the gods of Egypt were false and the God of the Hebrews was the true and living God.

I wonder how many Egyptians became worshipers of the true God as a result of the miracles? Surely, at least some (cf. 9:20). We do know that some non-Israelites joined the people of God as they left Egypt. At least some were motivated by a desire to worship, serve, & follow the true God, who had so strongly revealed Himself.

One of the most obvious truths about God from this story is that He is all-powerful. He is greater than all the co-called gods of Egypt. He is greater than Pharaoh & his government. Compared to God, we are but dust. The next time your ego gets inflated like a bullfrog, you need to compare yourself to God. What else do we learn about God from this story? God is sovereign. That means He's in charge. He can give commands to Kings. He had every right to command Pharaoh to let His people go (7:16; 8:1). He even has the right to harden his heart to accomplish His purposes. Prov. 21:1 says, “The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord....” He is also the Great Redeemer & Savior. He saved His people Israel from bondage and death. He was in complete control of their salvation, even though Israel was resistant, and altogether unworthy. So we also see that God is a God of grace. Thus, the Exodus story reveals the true God to us in a dramatic way.

This is a foreshadowing of how God revealed Himself through Jesus. He had power over nature itself when He turned water into wine, when He calmed the storm, when He directed a large school of fish in His disciples' nets, when He multiplied the fish, and when He walked on water. His greatest demonstration of power was His resurrection from the dead!

God clearly wants to be known by us. He has revealed Himself. He wants you to know Him, and He wants to use you to make Him known to others. Let me show you how. Look back to chapter 7, v.1. There God says to Moses, "See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet." God gave Moses divine authority and power over Pharaoh. But He also did this as a further revelation of Himself. Pharaoh could not see God, but he could see Moses, & the acts of God through Him. Moses would be God's representative. He would manifest the power of God. He would speak the words of God. God clearly acted through Moses. Even so, we are to make God known to others. They should see God in us. They should see the love of God in us. They should see the power of God in us, transforming our lives, giving us victory over sin & the trials of life. They should be able to see God enabling us to do great things by His power. You may be the only "God" they see. As God placed Moses before Pharaoh, even so He has placed you in the path of an unbeliever, that you may make God known. Furthermore, since He is the God of all nations, we should not limit making Him known to our local community, but we should send missionaries to make Him known to the nations! That was the final command of the resurrected Christ!

Have you come to know God as He has revealed Himself. The more you know God, the more like Him you become. Are you making Him known to others by your life & service?

The second lesson is this:

B. God Reveals His Power that We May Be in Awe of Him – When we see the mighty power of God on display, we should say, "Wow!" Who else but the Supreme Judge of the universe can make the heavens and the earth do His bidding? Thus, we should worship such a God as He. We should stop making ourselves the center of our own universe, and acknowledge God's rightful place. When we contemplate the greatness of God, we realize even more that it's not about us; it's about Him!

Now consider with me a third way this story should impact our lives.

C. God Reveals His Power that We May Have Hope – Israel was suffering under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh. He & his people were more powerful than they. But God proved that He is far more powerful than any man or any nation, and in time, the hopes & prayers of His people were answered. God intervened, and gave the victory.

This is a foreshadowing of the great conflict to come in the end of time. The book of Revelation tells of a similar struggle between God and Satan. At times it will appear that Satan & the antichrist are winning. Then, the moon will "become as blood" (Rev. 6:12), a reminder of the first plague in Egypt. A Moses-type figure bears witness, along with one other at his side (Rev. 11). There are plagues & judgments. But the victory belongs to Jesus, who comes as King of kings, and Lord of lords! (Rev. 19). He will deliver His people. By the time the dust settles, there will be no doubt who is the greatest. In the end, Php. 2:11 says that "every tongue [shall] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So when you get down & discouraged, it appears that evil is prevailing, remember that God is still on the throne. He will prevail. Don't give up hope. You shall share in His victory

some day! Even death shall not defeat you, for Christ has conquered death, and offers eternal life to all who believe on Him.

We have learned that God is both sovereign and powerful. That leads to a fourth way this story should impact our lives:

D. God Reveals His Power that We May Obey Him – When God first revealed Himself to Moses and called him to go to Pharaoh, Moses resisted and made excuses. He even said, “Send someone else.” But after a while Moses & Aaron learned to obey God. Look with me at chapter 7, v.6, “Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as the LORD commanded them, so they did.” Likewise, v.10 says, “So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the LORD commanded.” (See also 7:20 Now they are living in obedience to the Lord.

That is the way it should be with us. God reveals Himself to us as the Mighty God, the Creator of all things and Sovereign over His creation. We should certainly obey Him as well. God commands us to repent of our sin (Acts 17:30). Have you obeyed Him? God commands us to be saved by trusting in His Son Jesus, who died for our sins on the cross (Acts 4:12). Have you obeyed Him?

Ah, but many refuse to yield their lives to the will of God. This was certainly true of Pharaoh. Again and again he refused to obey God, and let His people go, in spite of the fact that God had clearly revealed Himself & His power to him. For example, in chapter 7, v.13, “And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them....” Likewise, beginning in the last of v.22 we read, “Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this.” Pharaoh responded in similar fashion many more times (8:15, 19; etc.). To the very end of the contest (14:5ff), Pharaoh was a proud, unrepentant sinner who refused to hear God’s Word, or do God’s will. He illustrates those who harden their hearts rather than give heed to God. What does it mean to harden your heart? It means to see clear evidence of the hand of God at work and still refuse to accept His Word and submit to His will.

Conclusion: What about you? Have you seen the power of God through the Exodus story? Have you come to know God as He has revealed Himself? Are you making Him known to others? Are you in awe of Him? Are you worshipping Him on a regular basis? When you face problems, do you remember that God is bigger than your problems? Are you putting your hope and trust in Him? Have you yielded your life to Him? Are you living in obedience to Him? If you cannot answer “Yes” to those questions, it is time to allow God’s Word to change your life. Is God calling upon you to be saved today? Will you heed that call, or will you harden your heart, and not give your life to Christ? Heb. 4:7 says, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” Don’t make the big mistake that Pharaoh did. Obey the Lord’s call. Yield your life to Him. God is great. He is worthy of your worship, your trust, and your obedience.

Sources: Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Warren Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus* (Colorado Spring: Chariot Victor Books Publishing, 1998). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).