

## ***God Multiplies His Wonders***

Exodus 7:1-25

Fall Old Testament Sermon Series on Exodus

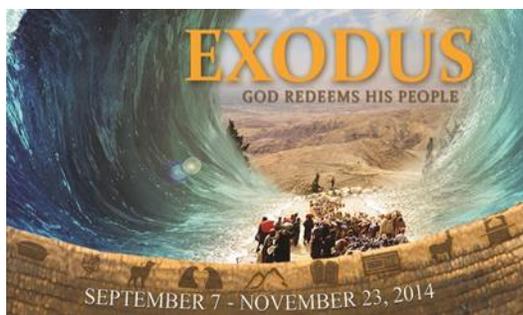
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

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**TEXTS:** Exodus 7:1-25

We continue this morning in our fall series on the book of Exodus. This morning, we follow a battle unlike any other. As a boy, I remember listening to my grandfather tell me about D-Day and the battle and the progression of the conflict. As I grew up, I became interested, like many



boys, in military history, and I loved to read about things like the Civil War or great battles and turning points in history. If you really want to get the Palmer family going, you just need to drop on the table people's thoughts about Alexander's strategy of the battle of Gaugamela and things should start to froth.

Battles are exciting; they are riveting. Oftentimes historians were grown men or boys who love to imagine the 'what if's' of the battle, the turning points. This morning, we look at a battle unlike any other. It's the battle of the Lord God Almighty. This battle is never in jeopardy, but we see both the character and the power of the living God as He wages war before our eyes. His war, though, is a war that conquers His enemies and brings salvation to His own people. We want to follow this epic confrontation.

The Lord says that He will multiply His wonders, and His purpose in doing so is to reveal His glory. His purpose is to humble proud and exalt the humble. The sequence of plagues that we will follow this morning is a great demonstration of the authority of God, and it is a sequence of battle that is designed with tremendous contextual knowledge of the context of ancient Egypt. Pharaoh, the adversary against the Lord, hardens his heart until the power of God overwhelms him. As this battle intensifies and rages, God's people begin to trust in Him. The narrative of this battle is encouraging to all of us who believe that our God is powerful and mighty to save. These events are celebrated and remembered throughout the entire remainder of the Bible, and they are the template of redemption, so they must grip our hearts this morning.

The battle is between God and Pharaoh. In Exodus 7:1, the Lord says to Moses:

*"See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh."*

God says that Moses represents God, and that this is a confrontation between the true God and a false god. In Egyptian royal theology, the pharaoh was thought of as a god. The tomb of Rehmire from just before the time of the Exodus says on the wall:

*“Pharaoh is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and the mother of all men, alone by himself without an equal.”*

The Egyptian *Tale of Sinuhe* records that the earliest rulers of Egypt were the gods themselves, and that Pharaoh stood in this succession of divinity. The way that the pharaohs depicted themselves in monumental architecture reflects this basic theology. The Egyptian pharaohs are



decked out with golden masks. The gold of the pharaohs signified that the pharaoh was perceived to be the incarnation of the sun god Re, and that his flesh was golden, just like the sun. In all Egyptian tomb paintings, the pharaoh alone has golden flesh, posturing himself like a god, and upon his death, in Egyptian mythology, the pharaohs would arise from their tombs, ascend to heaven, and become united

with the sun. The pharaoh was a strong, sovereign, defender of his people, a warrior without equal, omnipotent in Egyptian art and literature, and yet God confronts him. God, through Moses and Aaron, comes to Pharaoh and commands that he should let Israel go. God tells Moses in Exodus 7:2:

*“You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.”*

God continues and says in Exodus 7:3-4:

*“But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.”*

As we will see, the image of Pharaoh's heart becoming heavier and heavier is a profound statement of total defeat in the Egyptian setting. The military imagery of this battle is clear, and in Exodus 7:4b God says:

*“Then I will lay My hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out My divisions, My people the Israelites.”*

We sing in the hymn of Martin Luther's: “Lord Sabaoth His name.” *Sabaoth* means the *Lord of hosts* or *divisions*. It is the image of the Lord with His battle array. It is the same term used here: that God will bring His people out in triumph. Pharaoh will be totally defeated. Notice that the outcome of this confrontation, like all of God's mighty acts, has the outcome of creating a people. There is an evangelistic purpose to God's activity in the Exodus. Exodus 7:5 says the

outcome of this is:

*“And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out My hand against Egypt.”*

It is a battle fought by the Lord, just like the battle of the cross, and just like the battle at the end of time in Revelation. It is the Lord who fights for us, to bring salvation for us, and to conquer His and our enemies.

Let’s begin the battle proper. There is an initial salvo in Exodus 7:9. The Lord says to Moses and Aaron:

*“When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake.”*

The image of a snake is an image of ruling power. This is the headpiece of the mask of Psusenes, one of the pharaohs prior to the Exodus. On the front of his golden mask, his flesh of the gods, he has a serpent, a cobra, rising up. This serpent is an emblem of sovereignty and rule. The command to cast your staff down and then turning it into a snake is not a magic trick to get attention. It is a claim of an alternative sovereignty in the land. Moses and Aaron cast their rod down, and it becomes a snake. This image of a snake or serpent becomes joined at the time of the Exodus with both halves of Egypt joined, the upper and lower parts of Egypt. The



lower part of Egypt is symbolized by the cobra; the upper part by a vulture. Pharaohs from the time of the Exodus forward have their golden flesh and their royal kingly headdress with these two emblems of royalty on the front. Pharaoh's magicians mimic this sign, just as snake handlers in Egypt do today. I'm told that if you grab a cobra and pinch its head really tightly, it becomes stiff like a rod. They mimic

this sign, but what happens next would be immediately comprehended by the Egyptians. What happens next is that the staff of God consumes the staff of Pharaoh. It is a summons for the real King to arise. Pharaoh's heart becomes heavy in response, and the full-scale assault of the

plagues begins.

In Exodus 7:15, the Lord tells Moses:

*“Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake.”*

To go down to the river in the morning is a regular custom in ancient Egypt, for the Pharaoh, as the incarnation of the sun god Re, has the task every morning to walk out to the east and greet the sun as it comes up over the horizon. The sun has made the journey through the land of death in the place of Osiris and come up, and the Pharaoh has the responsibility, as the incarnation of Re, to see Re and greet him in the morning. The Lord tells Moses: “You go stand there, so that when Pharaoh comes out he will meet the real God at the river.” Pharaoh sees Moses there, and Moses says to Pharaoh in Exodus 7:16:

*“The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: ‘Let my people go, so that they may worship Me in the desert.’ But until now you have not listened.”*

This is the summons to worship. Moses goes on to say to Pharaoh In Exodus 7:17:

*“This is what the LORD says: ‘By this you will know that I am the LORD:’ With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood.”*

The Nile is the heartbeat of Egypt; there is no Egypt without the Nile. When you fly over Egypt, it is obvious from the air. You look down, and it is a desert wasteland, uninhabitable, not



suitable for civilization for hundreds of miles on either side, except for this one ribbon of life. If you don't have the Nile, you do not have Egypt. It never rains there; the civilization depends on the regular, annual inundation and flooding of the Nile. In Egyptian theology, it is the pharaoh himself who is responsible for this. Pharaoh, as God incarnate, is the sustainer and guarantor of all creation. He is

responsible for maintaining the cosmic order, which the Egyptians call *ma'at* or *order*, depicted as a feather: truth, justice, balance, and integrity. In ancient Egyptian, a hymn sings:

*“Truth (ma'at) has repressed falsehood....  
The water stands and does not fail,  
The Nile carries a high flood.  
The days are long, the nights have hours,  
The months come aright.*

The gods are content and happy of heart,  
Life is spent in laughter and wonder.”

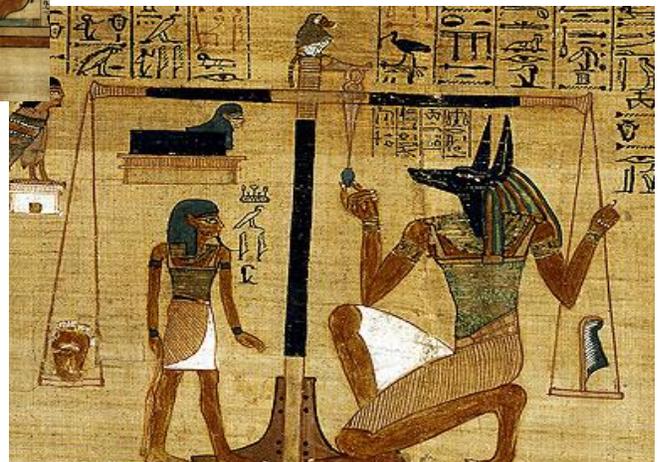
It is the pharaoh's responsibility for ensuring this through his piety and devotion, and God confronts him right at the center of his being. He commands the Nile to instead of becoming a path of life, to be turned into a path of death. Scholars, historians, wonder if this is actual blood or if this is a figurative representation of a contamination of the Nile, which is attested in other ancient Egyptian sources. Other ancient Egyptian texts reference occasions where the Nile turns to blood and becomes undrinkable, perhaps referring to this incident. They stretch out their hand and strike the Nile, doing just as the Lord commanded. The fish in the Nile die; the river smells bad; and blood is everywhere in Egypt. The Lord reveals that the Egyptian magicians manage somehow by their secret arts to mimic the works of God, and yet Pharaoh's heart becomes hard. Literally, it becomes heavy.

In order to understand what is really being communicated, we need to travel together back to ancient Egypt. This crucial scene from the Egyptian *Papyrus of Ani* helps us understand what's



happening. It is the scene that secures passage into the afterlife. It's a scene of judgment. At the top of this panel are the Egyptian gods; in the lower corner, dressed in white, are Ani and his wife coming to the place of judgment. In the middle of the picture, there is a set of scales. To the one side is Thoth, the god

of the scribes, with his scribal pad up and his stylus ready to record. Behind Thoth is the god of judgment and destruction, a grotesque hybrid creature Ammit, part crocodile, part lion, and part hippo ready to devour. When you look in closely at this central scene of judgment, you see what the Egyptians called *the weighing of the heart*. When someone died, the embalmers took out all of the organs except for the heart. The heart was left in the body because it was brought to this scene of judgment. There is Anubis, with the dog's head and the divine headdress, balancing the scale, god of the underworld. On one side of the scale is the feather of *ma'at*: truth and justice and righteousness; on the other side of the scale is the



heart. If the heart is heavy, then you will be destroyed. Egyptians feared coming to this scene of judgment with such terror that they laid scarabs over the heart of the deceased to provide the right incantations and spells. The walls of the tombs were covered with what you should say in that moment. It was a negative confession of innocence. These are the first five lines of the negative confession:

“I have not done wrong.  
I have not robbed.  
I have not stolen.  
I have not slain people.  
I have not stolen the gods’ property.”

Imagine Pharaoh, whom we have met in Exodus so far, having to say these words! The confrontation of the plagues reveals the heaviness of the heart of Pharaoh, and as this sequence of judgment unfolds, Pharaoh's heart gets heavier and heavier and heavier. The Hebrew expression is *to make hard*, but literally it means *to make heavy*. Every act of injustice, every move of unrighteousness, is weighing him down even further, and God says: “I will judge him for his unrighteousness.”

As the plagues unfold, this battle escalates: the Nile proceeds to a plague of frogs swarming the land. Pharaoh staggers and pleads to be prayed for, but when he is given a respite, his heart becomes harder. The Egyptian magicians then try by their secret arts to produce the third plague of gnats, but they cannot. They can only imitate, just as Satan can only imitate, but he can never create anything. They imitate these initial plagues, but they are unable to generate life. The magicians turn to Pharaoh and they say in Exodus 8:19:

*“This is the finger of God.”*

Yet, Pharaoh’s heart is heavier. In the fourth plague of flies, the Lord tells Moses in Exodus 8:20:

*“Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water.”*

We see this same custom again, and he is met by the living God. The plague of flies introduces a new element as the Lord says in Exodus 8:22:

*“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.”*

As the battle intensifies, Pharaoh's heart becomes hard, the magicians begin to be defeated, and, all of a sudden, there is a separation, just like in Genesis 1: where God’s people are, there is no death and destruction. Pharaoh again pleads for Moses to pray for him, and he is given a respite; and yet his heart hardens again.

The fifth plague of livestock escalates beyond water, to creeping things, to animals, almost going back up the scale of creation. God says in Exodus 9:1:

*“Let My people go, that they may serve [worship] Me.”*

In this plague upon livestock, the Lord again makes a distinction between His people and Pharaoh’s. We read of this evangelistic impact in Exodus 9:6-7:

*“And the next day the LORD did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.”*

Keep noticing the difference. The magicians cannot reproduce this either. The sixth plague escalates further with disease on animals, and now people. The magicians are unable to stand before Moses, and we read in Exodus 9:12:

*“But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.”*

This imagery of cosmic dissolution goes up to a higher register with the seventh plague: a destructive plague of hail on plants, animals, and human beings. The Lord says: “I will bring upon Egypt something which has not occurred since Egypt became a nation, from the dawn of time.” The hail struck plants of the field, trees were shattered, both animals and people destroyed. Yet, we read in Exodus 9:20:

*“Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses.”*

Do you see what's happening? Pharaoh’s heart is getting heavier; his magicians are being defeated; God's people are realizing that they are being saved; and Egyptians are recognizing the power of God, and some of them are beginning to fear the Lord and join to this other side. As the battle progresses, Pharaoh's heart is still hardened.

The Lord again tells Moses in Exodus 10:1:

*“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, 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.”*

So, we see the eighth plague of locusts rises to a higher register. The Lord's battle is done in such a scale that it is designed to be remembered forever. I never had to beg my grandfather tell me about D-Day. It was something he could never forget, and he wanted me to know what

happened. This is the battle of the Lord, that we would know the power of our God, that He is righteous and judges those who exalt themselves against Him. Pharaoh is finally brought to the edge of himself after this plague of locusts. We read in Exodus 10:16-17:

*“Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, ‘I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the LORD your God only to remove this death from me.’”*

This is something no Pharaoh could ever say. He was to be God, incarnate, sinless, and yet he says: “I have sinned; forgive me.” But, we see his heart is actually not truly repentant, for he says; “Forgive me just this once.”

The ninth plague, the plague of darkness, reaches the climax of these plagues. We see that the plagues are not really a set of attacks against individual Egyptian gods, but they are directed straight at Pharaoh's claims that he is the incarnation of the sun, and now it is dark for three days. It was a darkness that, the Bible says, could be felt. Pharaoh finally says in Exodus 10:24:

*“Go, serve the LORD; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.”*

To this, Moses says in Exodus 10:25:

*“You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.”*

Moses tells Pharaoh: “We’re all going, our young, our old, our women, our children, our flocks and herds.” To this, Pharaoh reveals the true state of his heart. He says in Exodus 10:28:

*“Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.”*

Moses replies in Exodus 10:29:

*“As you say! I will not see your face again.”*

God's people are in awe, though the battle is not fully resolved.

We end this morning with a note of tension and suspense. Pharaoh has said: “Next time you see me, I’m going to kill you.” We will see next Sunday how God makes the means for His people to be delivered. Pharaoh's heart is heavy, and the application this morning is that we are tempted to harden our own hearts. Hebrews 4:7 says:

*“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

This is a stern warning, and lest we think that is just for Pharaoh back then, we must remind ourselves that the plagues of Egypt are the template for the plagues in Revelation upon all the

earth, and just as the plagues in Egypt had the effect of hardening the recalcitrant to judgment and revealing the power of God and engendering faith in His people, so do the plagues in Revelation have the same effect: hardening the recalcitrant and birthing faith in God's people. Can you imagine seeing this? What would you feel: awe and wonder, the power of God? How does God do that? I don't know how He does that any more than I know how He says: "Let there be light," and there's light. I think they are both awesome. How many stars are there in the sky? Genesis just 'happens' to throw in "and He made the stars." Our God is awesome and powerful! I think there's another consequence for us, and it's a deep humility and confidence in the Lord.

There are the three things I really want you to take away from message.

- 1) Firstly, I want you to not harden your heart. God is a just Judge, and He will repay.
- 2) Secondly, I want you to feel awe and wonder at the power of the Lord.
- 3) Thirdly, I want you to have a deep humility.

Can you imagine realizing, halfway through these plagues, that God is actually making a distinction between us and them. He is judging them and saving us. You ask why is He saving us? We will answer that next week. How is he saving us? "Let them go, that they may worship Me, and we feel a deep humility and a confidence in Him. I don't know what you're facing specifically in your lives today, but I can assure you from Scripture that a God with this amount of power, who is on your side, changes everything. When we realize that God is big and mighty, our problems come into scale. He is on our side, the narrative tells us. The battle belongs to the Lord, and He is, in fact, mighty to save. Let us pray.

Lord, we thank You this morning for Your might and power revealed in the sight of all peoples and recorded in this tremendous portion of Your Word. Father, I want to pray this morning for any heart that is hard or heavy, unresponsive to You, that You would soften it. I pray, Father, that You would cause us this morning, each one of us, to feel a renewed sense of awe and wonder at Your power, and that You, Lord, would vivify our lives, and that faith would rise from deep within us, and that we would face whatever we are facing today with the great confidence knowing that the battle belongs to the Lord, that if Lord is with us, whom shall I fear? Father, we pray for the vain boasting in our world today of those whose rhetoric far exceeds their capacity, just like Pharaoh. I pray, Father, that You would vindicate and free those who are oppressed, who are suffering, this morning, and I pray, Father, that You would empower us as Your people to know You and to love You and to recognize that You alone are mighty, mighty to save.

Would you stand with me as we sing to our God who is mighty to save? Amen.