

## To Swallow Up Death

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Exodus: Redeemer and Redeemed / Exodus 7:1–13

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### Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does the symbolism of Aaron's rod becoming a serpent speak to the concept of God's authority over both natural and supernatural realms?
  2. Reflect on the statement that Moses's powerlessness in himself was critical for God's deliverance. How does this perspective inform your understanding of God's use of human weakness?
  3. Considering God's judgments revealed through the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, discuss how this demonstrates His glory and the futility of resisting His will.
  4. How does the ultimate triumph of Christ over sin and death through His resurrection reflect in the story of Moses and Pharaoh, and what does this mean for you personally?
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### Sermon Notes

**Main Idea: Just as God showed his power over Egypt's God, He shows his triumph over sin and death through Jesus Christ.**

Now, let me read [Exodus 7:1-13](#)

#### **Exodus 7:1–13 ESV**

<sup>1</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. <sup>7</sup> Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh. <sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>9</sup> "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.'" <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and

they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. <sup>12</sup> For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. <sup>13</sup> Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

**Turning Point in Exodus:** The beginning of the contest between God and Pharaoh. We start a new section of Exodus here, bookended by the foreshadow where Aaron's staff "swallows" up Pharaoh's serpents in 7:12 and concludes in 15:12 where Yahweh closes the Red Sea in on Pharaoh's pursuing army.

## 1. See how God's power sends his servants (7:1-2, 9)

### God's Sovereign Appointment

God appoints Moses as His representative, showing His sovereign choice to use flawed humans to fulfill His divine purposes.

The emphasis is totally on **God's sovereign appointment**. Moses has pointed over and over to his inadequacies and God seems unconcerned because Moses's powerlessness in himself is critical. God—not Moses—is going to be the one who delivers.

Moses's job is not to make Pharaoh pay attention to him. This will be God's work.

**God is keen to show Egypt that Pharaoh is no god at all by taking a timid, ex-con shepherd and making him a god.**

## 2. Excursus

We are at a significant inflection point in the book of Exodus which will reverberate throughout Scripture.

The scenes we are about to cover were set long before Joseph arrives in Egypt. God set the stage in Genesis 15:13-16

### Genesis 15:13–16 ESV

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Egypt, in one sense, at any moment could have cried out, but, in another very real sense, God raised *this* Pharaoh up to demonstrate his power.

The argument is from the greater to the lesser: if God could take an enslaved peoples and lead them out of captivity in the then greatest military and economic powerhouse, then surely he could lead a parade of Israelites out to settle the land of the Canaanites. It would be him alone to keep his covenant with Abraham

To show this, he has set up:

- A reluctant Moses
- An unconvinced Pharaoh
- A broken and beaten people
- A non-people against a legendary people

### **3. See God's sovereignty over the human heart (7:3-4).**

#### **The Sovereignty of God in Hardening Hearts**

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God demonstrates His control over human hearts and destinies, underscoring the seriousness of rebellion against Him.

#### **The Purpose of God's Judgments**

God's judgments, manifested through the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, serve to reveal His glory and the futility of resisting His will.

### **4. God uses signs and wonders to demonstrate his power against evil (7:5-13)**

Focus on the staffs here, because, again, this is going to be opening up a new chapter within Exodus which is a polemic against the Egyptian pantheon—but not the people of Egypt

#### **Aaron's Rod Becomes a Serpent**

The transformation of Aaron's rod into a serpent before Pharaoh signifies God's supreme power over the natural and supernatural realms, challenging the false gods of Egypt.

The Biblical authors beyond Moses were aware of how much the Egyptians revered the serpent image. Hear [Eze 29:3](#)

#### **Ezekiel 29:3 ESV**

<sup>3</sup> speak, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.'

Dragon reflects the influence of the LXX in the Hebrew tradition there that makes sense in the book of Ezekiel to evoke terror, but the Hebrew word is identical to the

one here (*tannīm*). So, even Ezekiel is aware of how the Pharaoh wanted to see himself stylized: the great Serpent.

### **So, why does God use a serpent?**

To throw Pharaoh's symbol on the ground in front of him is the ultimate irony. Pharaoh has no power over these serpents Aaron has made appear before him.

More over, God is allowing Moses and Aaron to do the things *their mythologies only dreamed about!*

## **5. The Magicians' Imitation and Its Limitations**

The Egyptian magicians' ability to replicate Aaron's sign, yet being ultimately outdone, illustrates the limitations of human power in the face of divine authority.

Jewish rabbis believed that the court magicians used slight of hand. That might be the case, but the term "magician" here has exceptionally dark undertones.

- Bible's ambivalent stance towards wisdom, acknowledging both its potential for good and its capacity for leading to harm. While wisdom is often portrayed positively, as in the case of the wise men who visit Jesus in the New Testament, the article points out several Old Testament instances where wisdom leads to negative outcomes, emphasizing that without the fear of the Lord, wisdom can be destructive. Think, for example, think of the "clever" serpent in the garden.
- In the Bible, the authors explain that sorcery aims to alter the future through black magic and is considered more demonic and unacceptable compared to divination, which involves predicting the future through omens. The article also notes the biblical prohibitions against sorcery and the severe penalties for its practitioners, despite its practice by figures like Queen Jezebel and King Manasseh.<sup>1</sup>

So, while the Bible does not clarify exactly what the "secret arts" of the magicians are, it is something darker than slight of hand.

## **6. Christ: The Ultimate Authority and Redemption**

Just as God demonstrated His power over Egypt's gods, He has ultimately triumphed over sin and death through Jesus Christ, offering freedom and new life to all who believe.

The Pharaoh had power because he gave the illusion of the power of death by controlling imaginations surrounding the image of a serpent.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., Hamilton, *Exodus*.

## Jesus as the New Moses

With these images in your head now, hear how the Old Testament talks about and anticipates the work of the Messiah.

### **Isaiah 25:8 ESV**

<sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

Now hear how the New Testament talks about Jesus' work.

### **1 Corinthians 15:54 ESV**

<sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

### **Hebrews 2:14–15 ESV**

<sup>14</sup> Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

What is the sign of our time? A transformed life and reconciled community.

## **The Gospel's Power to Soften Heart**

What is the sign of our time? A transformed life and reconciled community.

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## **Bibliography**

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