



John Martin, The Seventh Plague of Egypt, 1832

**About the artist and painting:** The English Romantic painter John Martin was no stranger to death and despair. Out of the 13 children born to his mother and father, John was one of only 6 that survived childhood. He grew up in poverty, the son of a farm laborer. In 1813, John lost his grandmother, mother, father, and youngest son all in the same year. Despite his popular appeal to English society, he was never really celebrated much less even accepted by the art community. Yet he was somewhat of a revolutionary by choosing to paint very fantastic, biblical scenes and landscapes. One can't help but think John looked to the extraordinary aspects of the bible to deal with the harsh realities of life in a broken world.

His 1823 work, *The Seventh Plague of Egypt*, helps to capture the deliverance theme so prevalent in the book of Exodus. In the painting you have these mighty structures of Pharaoh's palace, city, and pyramids all displayed in their grandeur. In Moses' day this represented to God's people Pharaoh's power and oppression towards them as he ruthlessly made their lives harsh. Yet God is breaking into these circumstances, "showing up" to bring about His deliverance. In this painting, over and above the Egyptian structures is something more magnificent, the storm of God: thunder, hail, and fire being poured down upon the oppressor and persecutor of His people. And your eye is drawn to the man standing on the left side of the painting, Moses, with outstretched arms looking to the LORD and His deliverance.

## **The purpose of Exodus:**

“The original purpose of Exodus was theological, to teach God’s people about himself and their relationship to him.” - Peter Enns, NIVAC, 25.

“Exodus is about a man, Moses. He is central to the narrative in a way in which no single character, not even Abraham, dominates Genesis...Exodus is about a nation, Israel, moving from slavery in Egypt into freedom...but ultimately Exodus is about God, about the God of the covenant who has instituted a new relationship between himself and those whom he has called to be his people.” - John Mackay, Exodus, 9.

“The whole story of Exodus is a covenant narrative. The God who pledged himself to Abraham and his descendants remained the faithful God. He had made promises and intended to honor them, and when his moment came, honor them he did...in a word, Exodus cannot be described simply as the book of the holiness of the Lord, nor simply as the book of the presence of the Lord, but as the book of the holy God present in all his holiness at the heart of his people’s life, their provident savior and friend, who makes provision whereby they, in all their unworthiness, may live safely with him.” - Alec Motyer, The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Exodus, 20, 23.

Setting for Exodus 1:1-2:25 Israel in Egypt. The opening section sets the stage for the rest of the book by describing: the connection to the narrative of Genesis (Ex. 1:1–7), the oppression that has arisen under a new pharaoh (1:8–22), the preservation of Moses at birth (2:1–10) and later in Midian (2:11–22), and the declaration of God’s intimate knowledge of Israel’s suffering and God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (2:23–25).

## **Exodus is a journey in two parts.**

Part One: Egypt Exodus 1-15 Aug. 7th – Oct. 30th

Part Two: Sinai Exodus 16-18 Nov. 6th – Nov. 20th

*Pause for Advent: Nov. 27th – Dec. 18th*

Part Two Cont. Sinai Exodus 19 Jan. 8th – June 25th

*Pause for Missions Sunday: February 5th*

*Pause for DNOW: February 19th*

## **Resources for further study:**

Exodus: A Mentors Commentary by John Mackay

Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Volume 2) (The New American Commentary) by Douglas Stuart

“The oppression was something that the Lord had warned Abraham about: ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years’ (Gen. 15:13). Such a warning had been given in advance to sustain the people through the hard times they would have to endure. Knowing that the oppression was as much a part of God’s plan as their growth in numbers had been, which should have strengthened them to wait for the divine resolution of their destiny.”  
– John Mackay

“It is in Exodus that the vocabulary of redemption that is so much part of the Gospel message is introduced. Here God acts to provide the reality of salvation for his people, and the OT church delighted to focus on that reality.”  
– John Mackay

## SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

### Exodus 1:1-22 ESV

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

Scriptures for further study:

Colossians 1:13

Genesis 41:39-40

Genesis 42:1-2

John 16:33

John 10:27-28

Romans 8:28

Exodus 1:13-14

“Embedded in the opening chapters of Exodus the author, Moses, presents the pervasive hand of God turning events to his purposes. The people of God are never ‘merely’ gripped in life’s circumstances, they are always gripped in the hand of God. We trace the evidence for this in the supernatural preservation of the Israelites during their suffering in Egypt. There is so much against what ‘should’ have happened that we can only account for it by saying that there must be some other factor at work that ensured that the people were not at the mercy of circumstances.”  
-Alec Motyer

## BIG IDEA

In the crushing weight of today's oppressive circumstances, only the eyes of faith can catch a glimpse of God's unseen yet supreme presence and compel the heart to hope against all odds.

## OUTLINE

1. The crushing weight of oppressive circumstances

2. The Unseen yet Supreme Presence of God

I Will Sing the Wondrous Story by Francis Rowley

### *Chorus*

I'll sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me,  
Sing it with the saints in glory,  
Gathered by the crystal sea.

### *Verse 4*

Days of darkness still come o'er me,  
Sorrow's paths I often tread,  
But the Savior still is with me;  
By His hand I'm safely led.

## DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Think of an example of God’s unseen presence in your life (ask family or friends if it is hard to recall)? What was the evidence of his presence?
2. What are some examples of circumstances that weigh people down? What are some ways that people respond to difficult circumstances? Based upon John 16:33 Christians are assured that life will be hard, but that Jesus has overcome every oppression so that Christians can have hope during oppressive circumstances. Is there a circumstance in your life or in the life of someone you love which seems unsurmountable? How are you coping with that? What encouragement from the message can you share?
3. How can circumstances overshadow the presence of Christ in our lives? Do you know someone who has been praying for God to change their circumstances and yet no change has happened? The Israelites prayed for a deliverer for over 400 years. Then God sent Moses. God blessed his people by increasing their numbers during that time. God is working mightily in us even it seems that he is silent. How can the message of Exodus 1:20 be an encouragement? What can a faithful response to oppression look like?

***Praise to Jesus*** - Ask the Holy Spirit to show you times when God’s presence was not seen but evidence in your life shows that he was there. Offer the sacrifice of praise to Jesus for his presence in your life. Offer praise to Jesus for the reality that all oppressive circumstances are purposeful: to bring growth and spiritual revival in your life.

***Repentance through Jesus*** - Have you let oppressive circumstances cause you to fear and respond with anxiety? Repent through Jesus of the many ways in which you have allowed your situation to dictate your faith, hope, and joy in the Lord.

***Consecration for Jesus*** - Consecrate your heart and your actions for Jesus to see and compel others to see oppressive circumstances through the eyes of faith and to catch a glimpse of God’s unseen yet supreme presence and to have hope against all odds.

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Scriptures for further study:

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Hebrews 11:22-23

1. As background to the study of Exodus, read God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob found in Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-7, 17:1-8, 26:1-5, 28:13-15.
  - a. Also read Genesis 15:12-15 about how God told Abram about the coming time in Egypt for the Israelites and the Exodus.
  - b. If your children attended VBS in June, then ask them what they remember about the story of Joseph from Genesis 37-50. Specifically ask them about what led the Israelites to move to Egypt.
  
2. In Exodus 1:7 we read "the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them". Ask your children if they remember God's commands to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28. Talk with them about how God's people, the Israelites, were fulfilling God's original commands.
  
3. From Exodus 1:8-10, ask your children why the Egyptians started treating the Israelites as slaves. Talk with them about how the current Egyptian King or Pharaoh forgot how God used an Israelite, Joseph, to save Egypt from a famine about 300 years prior to where the book of Exodus began. Now the current Pharaoh is afraid of the Israelites because there are so many of them.
  
4. The story takes a dark and evil turn as the Pharaoh orders that the Israelite baby boys be killed.
  - a. If you have young children, then you may want to talk about how Pharaoh wants to hurt the Israelites and is actually opposing God since this would seemingly prevent God's plans for the Israelites. But we know that nobody can stop God's plans.
  - b. If you have older children, then ask them why the Pharaoh would want the baby boys killed. Talk with them about how the Pharaoh is scared of the Israelite boys growing up to be soldiers that fight against Egypt.
  - c. Ask your children what they think God is going to do to help His people.
  - d. Read Exodus 1:21 and ask your children why the Hebrew midwives don't follow the Pharaoh's command. Talk about how fearing God means having an awe or reverence or deep respect for God and how this is different from our common understanding of fear.

## FOR STUDENTS

1. Why do you think God allowed his people to become slaves to Pharaoh? Why do you think he allows difficult situations into the lives of those whom he loves?
2. How does the failure of Pharaoh's plans to extinguish Israel encourage you as you look at what is happening in the world today?
3. Who or what do you find it easy to live in greater awe of than God? Why?
4. In what ways are you being called to act in courageous obedience by trusting the promises of God?

\*Selected questions borrowed and adapted from *Exodus for You* by Tim Chester and *Opening up Exodus* by Ian Campbell.

## FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. As you read through the Book of Exodus, keep in mind the big picture. The Exodus story is a picture of salvation: just as God led Israel out of bondage in Egypt, so does God lead us out of slavery to sin and death through the saving work of Jesus Christ. If the Bible is still very new to you, it is okay if you sometimes find it to be hard to understand in places. Don't get discouraged. Just try to learn the big story line and don't get caught up in details. Always keep the plain things the main things!

2. The Hebrew midwives did what was right by choosing to fear God (verses 17, 21) rather than obey man (even Pharaoh!). As a believer, be prepared that you will often be challenged to go against what people or society are telling you, in order to remain true to God. While this will not always seem to result in your immediate advantage, why is this always the best decision? See also Acts 4:19-20 and Acts 5:29 for some NT examples of choosing to stand strong for God.

3. When we read in Exodus 1 of how the Israelites were growing in number, keep in mind that this was yet another example of God keeping his promises of blessing and fruitfulness for his people. God had made the same promise of blessing to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Ours is surely a faithful God! Not only is this true on a large scale, it is also true for us at the personal level. Take some time to reflect on his faithfulness to you individually.

4. God had originally led his people TO Egypt to help them prosper in a time of famine. Then, when the Israelites became oppressed IN Egypt, God continued to preserve them and even cause them to multiply. When conditions worsened, God would then lead his people OUT of Egypt. It is a story of God always being there for his people. Pray and ask God to give you faith to believe and understand his same love, guidance, and presence in your life.