



The Seventh Plague of Egypt, John Martin, 1823

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.

The setting for Exodus 1:1-2:25 is 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 - 39 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

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Exodus 4:1-17 ESV

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’” The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the Lord said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— “that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” Again, the Lord said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

Scriptures for further study:

Exodus 3:10

Ephesians 6:10

Ephesians 6:10

Corinthians 9:8

“It is to Moses that the task of rescuing the people is allotted. He is now divinely commissioned to be the instrument through whom God will work. It is part of the divine scheme of salvation for mankind that it is worked out through mankind. Though deliverance is only possible by supernatural intervention and power, yet God raises up individuals through whom he will work.”

- John Mackay

“The sovereignty of God is his absolute, independent right of disposing of all creatures according to his own pleasure.”

- Jonathan Edwards

BIG IDEA

The Father uses the cross and resurrection of His Son to strengthen us by His Spirit to follow His calling and shatter the excuses we bring forth against His sovereignty and sufficiency.

OUTLINE

1. Calling
2. Excuses
3. Signs & Wonders
4. Sovereignty & Sufficiency

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“The Near East at the Time of Exodus c. 1550–1200 BC

The book of Exodus is set in the time of the Late Bronze Age, when the Near East was dominated by the kingdoms of Egypt, Midianites, and the Hittites. These three kingdoms vied for influence over Canaan, Syria, and the north Syrian regions around Ugarit and Aleppo.”

- ESV Archeological Study Bible

“Burning Bush: Call of Moses. At the burning bush, God reveals himself, his promises, and his purposes to Moses (3:1–22) and also demonstrates his power both through and for Moses (4:1–17). The call of Moses marks the beginning of the role that he will fill as the one who will mediate between the Lord and his people, and it is recorded in detail here, in part to remind Israel that following the Lord necessitates fidelity to the covenant which he revealed through Moses (chs. 20–23).”

- ESV Study Bible

“God’s sufficiency is that, whereby he is able to communicate as much blessedness to his creatures, as he is pleased to make them capable of receiving; and therefore he is able not only to supply all their wants, but to do exceedingly above all that they ask or think.”

-Scott Swain

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. Is there a task at home, work or school, which has to be done that you try to avoid? What are the excuses you find to avoid doing “the thing”?
2. What does the word “calling” mean? We often think of “calling” as something God gives to leaders in the church. What has God called you to in your job? Wherever God has placed you in the kingdom, from the home to working for NASA, each job can be done or not done in a manner that pleases God. This is a hard calling. Are there ways that you have tried to avoid it or are you trying to avoid it now?
3. From Exodus 4:1-17, What were the “signs and wonders” God used to assure Moses and the people of Israel? What did God accomplish for Moses and the people through the signs? What did the signs show about who God is and what he does? What sign has God given us to show that he is working, that he is powerful and that he can be trusted?
4. What does the word “sovereignty” mean? In seven words or less what does it mean that God is sovereign?
5. What does the word “sufficiency” mean? Can you use seven words or less to describe God’s sufficiency?
6. When in the text does God assure Moses of his sovereignty and sufficiency? How can the hard about your calling look different in light of God’s power and provision? How can God’s sovereignty motivate and sustain you to embrace God’s calling for you?

Praise to Jesus: Spend time today praising God for Jesus Christ who is the One who gave His life for you so that He could be with you always through His Spirit who dwells inside of you, who empowers and equips you to walk in faith in the callings He has placed in your life.

Repentance through Jesus: Spend time today confessing to God that more often than not it is excuses that have been your focus more so than His sovereignty and sufficiency.

Consecration for Jesus: Spend some time today rededicating yourself to the different callings God has placed in your life. Commit to look to the Gospel and the Spirit for strength to fulfill them.

“Next to faith this is the highest art - to be content with the calling in which God has placed you.”
- Martin Luther

“Labeling something as impossible is frequently my way of excusing myself from doing something simply because it’s more difficult than I would like it to be.”
- Craig Lounsbrough

“The sovereignty of God is the fact that he is the Lord over creation; as sovereign, he exercises his rule. This rule is exercised through God’s authority as king, his control over all things, and his presence with his covenantal people and throughout his creation.”
- John Frame

“There are no maverick molecules in a universe where God is sovereign. Ultimately, everything bends the knee to His will and work.”
- R.C. Sproul

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. In this week's passage, Moses once again raises objections or doubts to God about his calling to be God's vessel for deliverance of the Israelites.

- a. Talk with your children about a time when you were a child and you argued with your parents about something that you didn't want to do. Tell them that this is a little bit like what Moses is doing with God.
- b. What are Moses' two objections found in verses 1 and 10?
- c. How does God respond to the two objections? Talk with your children how God gave Moses signs to confirm his calling (Exodus 4:2-9). In verses 11-12, God reminds Moses that He is the One who will guide Moses' words. Then in verses 14-17, God gives Moses a helper, Aaron, as his spokesperson.

2. Ask your children what it says about God that He listens to Moses' objections and responds to Moses. Talk about how we see God's patience with Moses even when He gets angry (verse 14) with Moses. You can also talk about how we see God's grace towards a sinner. Even though Moses is a great Bible hero, he is not perfect. His doubts and objections show a lack of faith in God. Yet God shows His grace to Moses just as He does for us. Take time to thank God together for sending Jesus to die for our sins so that we may be forgiven.

3. Ask your children what signs Jesus gave us to help us get over our struggles with God's calling on our lives. Talk with them about the cross and empty grave as signs and reminders of Jesus' death for our sins and His victory over death and sin. Also talk with them about the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as signs that point us back to Christ's covenant victory and promises.

FOR STUDENTS

1. The signs God has given us of his reality and character are the cross and the empty tomb. How should this shape the way we share our faith with those who don't believe in him?

2. God gives us our mouths and helps us to speak. How will this change the way you think about sharing your faith, and the regularity with which you actually do it?

3. In the last week (or month, or semester), what circumstances or reasons have caused you to doubt God's presence or question his faithfulness to you?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. God gave Moses the ability to perform miraculous signs to prove to the Hebrews that Moses had come to them on behalf of God. We are often like the Hebrews, skeptical unless God proves himself to us. But God reveals himself to us, first in creation, and most importantly through Jesus Christ as revealed in God's word. Is there any further proof he could offer? What other evidence are you seeking? What is keeping you from believing God? Are you sincerely seeking answers?

2. The great 17th century scientist, mathematician, and philosopher Blaise Pascal once argued that when it comes to God revealing his truth to us, there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough obscurity for those who don't. To put it simply: if you are looking for God, you will likely succeed; if you are avoiding him, you will also likely succeed. What about you? Do you truly want to believe? Will you take that step of faith?

3. When you become a believer, you surrender yourself to God and let him determine your life path and calling. Moses wasn't so sure about his new calling to become a public speaker! What about you? Are you open to letting God use you in whatever way he desires? What if God calls you to do something hard or uncomfortable? But look at verse 12 again and notice what God promised to do for Moses. Do you trust God that what he calls you to do he will also equip you to do it?

4. When it comes to evangelism, many of us are like Moses: we think that we just aren't eloquent enough to speak to others about our faith. The truth is, we don't have the words to speak, and even if we did, we certainly don't have the power to convince someone with our words. But that's the point! God promises that what we don't have he will give us, if we will rely on him. See Matthew 10:19-20 for further encouragement.