

Crushing Idols And Counterfeit Gods (Exodus 8:20-9:11)

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Most of you know I grew up as a missionary kid in the Philippines and some of you have heard my story of a Sunday morning church service like nothing I've ever seen in the States.

- In the Philippines spirits and sorcery and spiritual warfare is big
- (even some in our church there still would see demonic things after they got saved).
- I remember vividly a family of new Christians
 - o they had turned from idols to the living God
 - o and they were publicly repenting of their former false gods.
- I was 7 years old (imagine this kids!). These new believers brought in pagan statues, covered with trash-bags, to the front of the church at the end of the service.
 - o The deacons were called up by the pastor with sledge-hammers
 - o They start smashing those gods to pieces!
 - o It was like breaking the power of cancelled sin, setting them free,
 - o demolishing those false deities. It was a powerful visual of crushing idols
 - o and the church sang the hymn "There's power in the blood."

We all saw those gods are nothing and nothing to turn back to

After our service today we'll be reaffirming our deacons and pastor/elders

- I don't know if we should add that to their ministry description!
- But I want to reaffirm now the wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb.¹

That's where our study in Exodus is going!

- God was working wonders against Egypt in His powerful plagues
- He'll soon set Israel free through the blood of the lamb in the Passover, and they'll sing!
- The 10 plagues publicly demolish false deities,
 - o so God's people won't turn back to them or trust anything besides Him.
- He's bringing down the hammer on the gods of Egypt
 - o showing their occult magicians their power is broken, crushing idols,
 - o and smashing Pharaoh's false religion to pieces, then taking it out with the trash.

In Ex 32, Moses grinds a god to pieces and makes them drink it to taste how bitter, bad idolatry is

The magicians said to Moses at the start 'You think you've got friends in high places, with the power to put us on the run ... You'll know what power is when we're done' (Prince of Egypt).²

Let's pick up our study in Ex 8, but to review: God gave a powerful visual:

- cancelling out the sorcerer tricks as they see God's greater serpent swallow their snakes.
- Then they saw the staff of God turn their river to blood.
- Egypt's gods supposedly controlled the river and kept order in Egypt
- Pharaoh was supposedly the god in touch with them all.
- The true Lord is hammering home 'I am God and you're not!'
- After 3 plagues, Egypt's sorcerers see and say that this is God

It's like Isa 19:1 'the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence' (NAS)

In v. 18 they can't duplicate God's power over nature, so v. 19: *the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.* ²⁰ *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 21 Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. 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. 23 Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen." ' ' 24 And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies. 25 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." 26 But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? 27 We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he tells us." 28 So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me." [pray to this God]*

**Outline: 1. The counterfeit gods then and now
2. The call to truly worship God alone**

These sorcerers counterfeited 2 of God's plagues but in **8:18** they can't and confess this is God

- God is putting His finger on their false religion.
- God says in **12:12** '*on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments...*'
- God is judging all their gods, crushing what they're trusting in
- so Israel can sing in ch 15 '*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?*'³ Answer: no one!

This is for our worship, too, to trust God alone and crush whatever is false

This isn't just about back then (magicians vs. Moses), this applies to us now. To Christians, 2 Tim 3 warns about the false '*religious [who] will reject the power that could make them godly... These teachers oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses. They have ... a counterfeit faith. But ... everyone will recognize what fools they are, just as with Jannes and Jambres*' (v. 5, 8-9 NLT).

- Those are the magicians opposing Moses
- and their folly is evident to all along with their counterfeit gods.

By chapter 11 everyone in Egypt will recognize what a fool Pharaoh is and all his phony gods.
Pharaoh was supposed to be the intermediary between man and gods for Egypt

Pharaoh tried to counterfeit the true God on many levels.

- He had people bow and worship him and call him their 'lord and god.'
- He held a staff that was supposed to show his supremacy and sovereignty over Egypt.
- His official title was 'son of Ra' (their most high god above) and they believed Pharaoh was the incarnation of a god⁴ (counterfeit of what we celebrate at Christmas).

But look at Ex 8:8: Pharaoh asks Moses to plead with the true LORD to take away the plague!

His gods and guys couldn't, so he begs Moses to pray to Yahweh (Hebrew for LORD)

History tells us Pharaohs would go down to the river to pray and worship the Nile's gods.

Look at 8:20: The true God tells Moses to go early in the morning to meet Pharaoh as he goes to the water and tell Pharaoh to let God's people go to serve/worship God (not Pharaoh or false gods).

This is where God had Moses first confront Pharaoh in ch 7 same time and place at the river, when he turned it to blood and the fish died. John Davis' book *Moses and the gods of Egypt*: 'the great Knum was considered the guardian of the Nile sources. **Hapi** was believed to be "the spirit of the Nile" ... One of the greatest gods revered in Egypt was the god Osiris ... Egyptians believed the river Nile was his bloodstream [true God turns it to blood and Hapi is not happy!]'⁵

Just like counterfeit money, these counterfeit deities were seen to be worthless

The Nile was their economy, prosperity, security,

- what they thought life was all about and from, what gave it meaning.

'For centuries the Egyptians praised **Hapi** as "the giver of life," "the lord of sustenance," the one "who causes the whole land to live through his provisions." They sang:

- **Hapi**, Who goes up from the land, who comes to deliver Egypt... [counterfeit of God]
- Who brings food, who is abundant of provisions, Who creates every sort of good thing
- Everything that has come into being is through his power'⁶ [where's his power in ch 8?]

It's like holding up the counterfeit bill to the light to show there's no watermark

It's possible Pharaoh was singing that hymn of thanksgiving

- Moses interrupts his worship to give him a word from the true Giver of life.
- The LORD announces He'll deliver from Egypt.

Moses wrote earlier in Gen 22 the true creator God is Jehovah-Jireh, or Yahweh will provide. Tony Merida applies then to now: 'To whom are you looking to provide for your needs? While you may have never heard of these Egyptian river gods, people are still tempted to trust in other things to provide for them, instead of God alone. Many place their final hope in the stock market, economic growth, a new president, or something else. All of these will pass away.'⁷

The dollar bill says 'in God we trust' but many trust in the dollar as their god

What you most prize you idolize.

- What people think life is all about and what gives it meaning and security
- What they look to above all to make them happy is the modern version of Hapi.

Ryken: 'The average American is not very different from an ancient Egyptian. We still worship the same gods... What we count on...what matters most to most of us is personal prosperity.

- We depend on our economy every bit as much as the Egyptians depended on theirs.
- They worshiped the Nile; we follow the NASDAQ...
- Rather than trusting in God alone, we depend on economic growth...
- In much the same way that the Egyptians praised the river as their creator, many Americans believe that we have come from a random stream of genetic material.'⁸

From evolution to Earth Day to Mother Nature to materialism, it's just new names

The banks of the river are also the scene of the 2nd plague as frogs come up it in swarms.

- Egypt worshipped frogs and had laws against killing them.
- A goddess Heqt supposedly married the god guarding the Nile and she had a frog head.
- The frog goddess was linked to conception and midwives
- Remember in ch 1 Pharaoh told them to kill Jewish boys and throw them in the Nile

But God rescued Moses in a basket at this riverbank while Egypt's gods can't rescue from frogs

Egypt couldn't kill frogs as sacred animals, but God makes what they worship croak and stink

The ancients worshipped Heqt to control childbirth

- but moderns can worship Health (different names but not that different).
- Under the name of health is the sovereign choice of life or death today
- the place that only God should have (that becomes a god when it takes God's position).
- Our world also has laws against killing animals but not against killing unborn humans.
- There are many ways today the Creator is replaced by creatures
 - o or climate or control can be our god.

In ch 8 God turns creation and creatures against man to show man isn't in control

In Ex 8:9 Moses tells Pharaoh basically 'say when,' and I think of a western movie showdown where they're coming after all the bad guys one-by-one. 'Tell him I'm coming' is ch 8, v. 21: *Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies **on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses.** And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. 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.***

I am...you're not. It's not about you, it's about Yahweh over all the earth

Not the Egyptian earth-god Geb who was supposedly in their midst! James Boice asks 'where was he to protect the land and keep it from producing the insects that brought such trouble for the people? ... A literal translation is that swarms of other insects came up over the land.'⁹

In the tropical land I grew up in, insects swarm.

- As a kid I remember times I had a swarm right over my head and wondered why:
 - o (my friend told me I needed to wash my hair).
- In our Philippines neighborhood I remember I learned riding bikes you had to be careful to keep your mouth shut!

In Egypt, flying biting insects are everywhere, no screens, no spray to keep away

5 years ago our family took a trip to the Mexico mission where our church gives Xmas presents.

- We visited the dump and gave out food and tracts
 - o but when we left, swarms of flies came with us in our vans.
 - o There seemed to be hundreds on the walls and roof even as we drove fast with windows down to try to get them out.
- Even 1 fly buzzing in a room can be super annoying
 - o but these are swarms on Pharaoh and all,
 - o in houses, even covering the ground (except in Goshen).

Not Jew has to say 'shoo fly, don't bother me,' but no Egyptian can shoo or swat them away

Some think these were dog-flies that bite and suck blood,

- but something even worse is behind this.
- Moses doesn't name Pharaoh or the Egyptian 'lord of the flies,'
 - o but the Bible later uses the name Beelzebul (went by different names for the lord of the flies).

Some said of Jesus¹⁰ *'He casts out demons by **Beelzebul, the prince of demons...**'* [Jesus asks] *'if Satan...is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?...But if it is by **the finger of God** that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come...*

So Beelzebul, lord of the flies, became a title for the prince of demons, Satan, and his kingdom.

- the lowercase *'god of this world'* who blinds unbelieving minds (2 Cor 4:4).
- 2 Thess 2 explains *'the work of Satan [is] displayed in all kinds of **counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders**'* (v. 9 NIV).
- Satan can't create, but he can imitate. Satan counterfeits or corrupts what God does.

But **'the finger of God'** casts him out (same phrase in Ex 8:19 when their demonic power fails).

In Egyptian myth¹¹ when the god Thoth stopped the snake god they called it 'the finger of God' (what Egyptians say in 8:19).

- This god Thoth was associated with magic and judgment, but God is judging the magicians of Egypt and they tell Pharaoh *this is the finger of God* (the real thing)!
- The Lord crushes idols and the serpent behind false religion.
- Last month was 100-year anniversary of finding King Tut's tomb (most famous serpent).
- We saw last time Pharaohs wore the serpent on their crowns
 - o but Gen 3:15 says the serpent's head will be crushed by the Lord.

Ex 8 ends just like last time

- Pharaoh doesn't ask his magicians or mythological gods for help,
- he asks Moses to pray to God for help and promises to let Israel go.
- But when Egypt gets relief, Pharaoh hardens his heart.

So plague #5 in Ex **9:3**: *behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are **in the field**, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴ But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die."*

- Apparently not animals in stalls or shelters (later those will be addressed)
- but every animal in the field dies the next day at the time God set

In v. 7 Pharaoh sends investigative reporters who confirm not 1 animal of Israel died

Egypt's livestock dying not only destroyed their livelihoods

- it showed the only living God vs. idols that were as lifeless as the animals they represent.
- In Ex 32 Israel makes a golden calf-god, but here sacred cows become stinking corpses.
- Apis was the chief bull, their queen god had cow horns.

Ryken: 'Apis was a masculine god: He represented sexual prowess. Hathor... a feminine god: She represented glamor...we sometimes worship the very same gods and goddesses. We are tempted to gratify sexual desire outside the marriage covenant or to glamorize our outward appearance for the sake of our inward esteem. But...idols of sex and beauty cannot save. They do not free us; they only bind us. The attractions they offer are temporary, and in the end those who lust after them will gain nothing but lonely, empty disappointment.'¹²

WORD OF APPLICATION TO WOMEN, MEN, YOUNG PEOPLE

One last visual spiritual lesson: **9:10**: *they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast.*¹¹ *And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for **the boils came upon the magicians** and upon all the Egyptians.*

In v. 10 God's servants stand before Pharaoh,

- but in v. 11 Pharaoh's servants can't stand before Moses because of the painful sores.
- In v. 20 some of his officials fear God. You might say 'they were sore afraid.'
- But in v. 11 notice that the boil judgment comes first on the occult magicians,
 - o then other Egyptians in v. 11.
 - o The gods they looked to for magical power don't stand a chance.

Egyptian priests often threw ashes on someone to try to bring a blessing.

- God turns their religion on them to bring a curse instead of a blessing on their priests!
 - o Gen 12:3 '*him who dishonors you I will curse...*'
- If priests had blemishes, they couldn't serve
 - o God's shutting down the priesthood so they can't even stand!

We'll look at ch 9 more next time but when Pharaoh looked at the soot from the kiln he'd know

- that was from where he made Jewish slaves bake bricks
 - o and make buildings in the boiling heat.
- He gave no straw, God gives him sores
- Israel's source of pain becomes Egypt's source of pain as justice.

This is judgment on the government as well as their gods, as their sorcerers are incapacitated.

This is a source of embarrassment to Imhotep, the Egyptian god over healing and medicine.¹³ Sekhmet supposedly had the power over epidemics or to end pandemics if you looked to her.¹⁴

Those are the counterfeit gods, we need to look to #2. The call to truly worship God alone

Voddie Baucham said in recent centuries pandemics, pestilence, and plagues moved people to turn to the Savior, but in recent years people now turn to the Science.¹⁵ He said that in 2014 but we hear it even more now: 'trust the science' (as a god in a way we're only to trust the Savior).

- Egypt feared so they put faith in their gods
 - o today people fear and put faith in their government.
- People bow to medical experts who say 'do this and you'll be safe'
 - o but experts fail and get sick

Leaders like to think and act like they're in control, then and now plagues show they're not

You can turn on 'Christian TV' and see supposed worship services with counterfeit healings

- health, wealth, and prosperity are promised by false teachers
- (and health itself can be a false god). Don't idolize your health.
- Medicine and science can be a servant,
 - o but it shouldn't be a master, and it's not the Messiah.

Whatever you're most devoted to or will sacrifice anything for is a god, if it's not The God.

There needs to be a distinction between unbelievers and believers in what they worship, live for.

What about you? Is there a distinction? Is Jesus isn't your Lord, bow to Him in repentant faith

God calls His people to be let go to serve/worship Him, and He says in Ex 8:22 He 'set apart' where His people lived so they would know He's the LORD.

- Then in 8:23 He puts a division between His people and Egypt
- that word *division* is literally the word for redemption.

God is putting redemption in, protecting His people from judgment, ransoming or delivering

We sang 'O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Isra-el...

Thine own from Satan's tyranny'

And 'set Thy people free; From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee'¹⁶

God can redeem, set free from past sins and fears and false hopes. "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me...*

- That's ch 20, the 1st part of the 10 commandments
 - o and why God delivered Israel by 10 plagues.

God needed to get Israel out of Egypt, and to get Egypt out of Israel (Egypt's false gods).

- God could've let His people go without 10 plagues,
 - o but He wants to publicly demolish false deities in the process,
 - o so His people won't turn to them or trust anything besides Him.
- God is judging all the gods of Egypt
 - o so He can say to Israel and to us '*you shall have no other gods before me*'

(don't just think statues, think whatever you serve before God, or seek first, or supremely value)

Beautiful Eulogy song: 'Whatever it is that gives that feeling that we can't live without
The joys we try to get that only God can give ... what we prize and are most proud about
These "gods" make promises but always lie to us ...

[they say] they'll keep us safe and satisfy us
 ... When a good God gives good gifts we ... twist the list ... and make "gods" out of gifts
 I suppose what exposes the worship in most of us
 Is a close look at most of our thoughts, fears, and emotions
 ... I prefer the immediate, And exchange the true God for what seems more expedient¹⁷

Where that's us, let's repent. Let's reject the counterfeits and receive the Savior who satisfies.
 As we come to communion, let's truly worship the true God alone. Let's examine our hearts.
 take the cup in reverence and new commitment make
 to cast out every idol, and live for Jesus sake¹⁸

¹ Lewis E. Jones, "There is Power in the Blood."

² "You're Playing with the Big Boys Now," Steve Martin and Martin Short.

³ Exodus 15:11 LSB.

⁴ "Pharaoh," in *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995): 'The pharaoh was probably the most important person in Egyptian society. The Egyptians believed he was a god and the key to the nation's relationship to the cosmic gods of the universe. While the pharaoh ruled, he was the Son of Ra, the sun god, and the incarnation of the god Horus. He came from the gods with the divine responsibility to rule the land for them. His word was law, and he owned everything... When the pharaoh died, Egyptians believed that he became the god Osiris, the ruler of the underworld and those who live after death... As an intermedator between gods and people, the pharaoh functioned as a high priest in the many temples in Egypt.'

⁵ John J. Davis, *Moses and the gods of Egypt* (BMH, 1986), 102

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus* (Crossway, 2005), 220-21.

⁷ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus: Christ-Centered Exposition* (B&H Publishing, 2014), 57.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 221-22.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Life of Moses* (Presbyterian & Reformed publishing, 2018), 88-89.

¹⁰ Luke 11:15-22.

¹¹ Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Hendrickson, 1999), p. 62.

¹² Ryken, 262-64.

¹³ Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus 1-18*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Lexham Academic Press, 2016), 395.

¹⁴ <https://ncartmuseum.org/the-art-of-healing-cat-power-for-egypt/>

¹⁵ Voddie Baucham, "The Seventh Plague: Hail, Part 1" <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=108141639515>

¹⁶ "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," and "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" (Wesley).

¹⁷ Beautiful Eulogy, "Messiah."

¹⁸ Peter Davis, "Thy Body Blessed Jesus."