



## Sermon Overview

Many of us have a fundamental understanding of the story of Exodus: Moses leads the Israelite people out of slavery in Egypt. This familiarity, however, can threaten our deeper understanding of God's redemptive action throughout the book of Exodus. Two key figures early in the story are Moses and Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. At this point in the story, Moses and Pharaoh represent the polar opposites of social, economic, religious and cultural life in the ancient near east. There is no reason the most powerful ruler of the time would ever cross paths, let alone entertain an audience, with an aged shepherd from another land.

Like the clash of Moses and Pharaoh, chapters five through nine contain many unlikely events that stir confusion among everyone. From Pharaoh's ignorance of God (5:1-2), to Moses' doubt regarding God's plan (5:22-23), to God's purposeful hardening of Pharaoh's heart (7:3) and a series of distressful, destructive and deadly plagues that miraculously crush the Egyptians and simultaneously spare the Israelites.

The combination of these events is on a scale of frequency and intensity that would have been virtually impossible to understand for Egyptians and Israelites alike. So what hope do we have – removed by time, space and culture – to understand the purpose and design of these incredible events? The key to our understanding is the same now as it was then. To understand God and his work in this world, we must understand that we are not the central figures in our story, just as Moses and Pharaoh were not the central figures in Exodus. God is. God is the purpose and point. In chapters five through ten, God sends Moses seven times to request freedom for his people *that they may serve God*. Eight times God brings destruction *and* deliverance *so that people know he is God*.

The confusion of the human condition has never been solved by starting with our concerns. Plagues and problems can only be persevered when we see and treasure God as the highest priority.

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## Starting with God

1. Read Exodus 6:1–13 and notice the repeated phrase, "I am the LORD." What reasons can you think of that God might emphasize and reemphasize that he is the Lord?

2. Several times in this narrative we are told that Pharaoh's heart was hardened by God and, at times, by Pharaoh's own rebellion. We struggle with the idea that God would harden Pharaoh's heart *and* hold him responsible for his actions. But it is a tension that the story presents, not solves. What comfort can be found in this confusion? What light could Ephesians 2:1-10 shine on this mystery?

### Living God's Word

3. The plagues suffered by the Egyptians were not randomly brought about by God. Each plague was purposed to discredit and defame specific Egyptian Gods (see: [resource page](#)). Are you aware of the things or people you place as priority ahead of God? What would a loving God do to remove the things that interfere with his priority in our hearts?

### Continuing the Discussion

4. Read Exodus 7:5, 7:17, 8:10, 8:22, 9:14, 9:16, 9:29 and 10:2. In these passages, God acts toward groups of people so that they may, for example, "Know that I am the Lord." For each passage answer three questions: (1) Who will know? (2) What will they know? (3) How will they know? How do some of these interactions point to circumstances in your own life that remind you that God is the center and purpose of our lives and all of scripture?

### Prayer

*Father God, please mold our hearts to value you more than anything else.  
Guide us to find our joy in you in all circumstances in life.  
Amen.*