

Who is the Lord, that I Should Obey Him? #6

Series: Epic Journey: From Where We Are to Where God Wants Us

Exodus 7:14 – 10:29

Introduction: There was a song that was written back in the day by singer/songwriter Jim Croce. It became a big hit. [Here are the lyrics:](#)

"Uptown got its hustlers; the Bowery got its bums; 42nd Street got Big Jim Walker; he's a pool-shooting son of a gun. Yeah, he big and dumb as a man can come, but he's stronger than a country horse. And when the bad folks all get together at night, you know they all just call Big Jim boss, just because.

And they say you don't tug on Superman's cape. You don't spit into the wind. You don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger. And you don't mess around with Jim." A dud-dud-a-dud, do, do-do-do.

"Well, out of south Alabama came a country boy. He say, 'I'm looking for a man named Jim. I'm a pool-shooting boy, my name is Willie McCoy, but down home they call me Slim. Yeah, I'm looking for the king of 42nd Street. He's driving a drop-top Cadillac. Last week he took all my money, and it may sound funny, but I come to get my money back.'

And everybody say, "Jack, don't you know you don't tug on Superman's cape. You don't spit into the wind. You don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger. And you don't mess around with Jim.'

Well, a hush fell over the poolroom. Jimmy come bopping in off the street. And when the cutting were done, the only part that wasn't bloody was the soles of that big man's feet. Yeah, he were cut in about a hundred places, and he was shot in a couple more. And you better believe they sung a different kind of story when Big Jim hit the floor.

Now they say, 'You don't tug on Superman's cape. You don't spit into the wind. You don't pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger. And you don't mess around with Slim.'"

Today we're going to witness a showdown, like the gunfight at the OK Corral. Pharaoh thinks he's big Jim Walker and He's getting ready to meet Slim.

Pharaoh thinks he's the son of Ra, Egypt's sun god [little "g"]. God is going to show Pharaoh, the Egyptians and Israel that He is the LORD God Almighty.

And when Moses comes to Pharaoh, sent by God, saying, "**Let My people go,**" Pharaoh says, "**Who is the LORD that I should obey Him?**"

That is the title of today's message as we continue our Epic Journey Series through the book of Exodus; "**Who is the Lord that I Should Obey Him?**"

Remember that Exodus is all about God's chosen people moving from slavery to the Promised Land. And the reason that's so relevant is that this is exactly what God does in our lives. So, if you are feeling stuck or stagnant or hopeless about the future, Exodus can give you a fresh vision of how God is working to bring you from where you are to where He wants you to be.

Now, if you remember last week, when Moses first came to Pharaoh, Pharaoh didn't let them go. Furthermore, he made it worse on them. They had to make bricks without straw, but he said, "Your quota of bricks is going to still be the same." And the people got mad at Moses. They said, "You've made us odious in the sight of Pharaoh. Now things are worse than ever."

And Moses went to the LORD, and said, "LORD, why did You send me? These things are worse. You haven't redeemed Israel at all." Now God says, "Now you will see what I will do. I'm going to make a mockery of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. I'm going to unleash the plagues."

Now, we come to a part of Exodus that's **well known**, but maybe not that **well understood**. I want to help you with that today. I'm talking about the account of the Ten Plagues that were unleashed on Egypt.

We're covering a huge section of Scripture, so there's no way we can read it all. I'm going to read about the first plague, and then summarize the other ones.

Exodus 7:14-18: "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. 15Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. 16Then say to him, 'The Lord, the

God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened.

17This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. 18The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.’ ” (NIV)

Go to verses 20-24: “Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. 21The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

22But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said. 23Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. 24And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.” (NIV)

Let’s Pray

So that's the first plague, the plague of blood. That's followed by plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies; then a plague that kills a large number of Egyptian livestock; then a plague of boils on the Egyptian animals AND people.

At that point it starts to hit their own skin; number seven is a plague of hail that destroys a lot of the Egyptian crops; number eight is a plague of locusts that wipes out all the crops and trees the hail didn’t destroy; and number nine is a plague of darkness.

In Exodus 10, verse 21, God describes it as ***“darkness that can be felt;”*** and it blankets the land of Egypt for three full days.

In one sense these plagues came against the gods of Egypt.

1)The water turned to blood was God’s judgment upon ***“Hapi”*** – the God of the Nile. Egypt worshipped the Nile god as their daily source of life and sustenance since it was the waters of the Nile that watered their crops and

gave them water that was necessary for drinking, cleaning, and bathing. Now that life-giving water carried nothing but death.

2)The frogs were a judgement against **“Heqt”** – a frog headed goddess that represented the resurrection of the dead of Egypt. Frogs would not only carry a symbolism of life after death, but the frogs would eat the flies that often troubled the land, but God turned that “blessing” into a curse.

3)The plagues of lice and of flies were judgments against **“Kheper”** – the god of beetles and flies. God’s plague was to prove to Egypt that he had power over the power of their idol to control the population of flies and lice that brought disease to the land.

4)The sickness upon all the cattle was God’s judgment against **“Apis”**, the sacred bull of Egypt. This was God’s way of letting Egypt know that the blood of bulls was not sufficient to cleanse their sin.

5)The plague of boils (huge running sores) was God’s judgment against the Egyptian gods **“Imhotep”** the physician god, and **“Thoth”**, the god of magic and healing. No medicine could relieve the pain and suffering, no magic potion could remove God’s wrath. It is a symbol to the Egyptians that their great sin could not be removed by the power of man or of idols.

6)The plague of hail was directed against **“Nut”**, the Egyptian sky goddess. God rained fire and brimstone, mixed with hail; upon the Egyptians to show that he had all power in earth and sky.

7)The plague of locusts was directed against **“Seth”**, the god of crops. God’s judgment destroyed those very crops that Seth was supposed to bless.

8)The plague of darkness was God’s judgment against **“Ra”**, the Egyptian sun god. Ra was the Egyptian idol that represented creation for they knew that all life depended upon the heat and light of the sun. God’s judgment against the power of the sun to give light was to prove to the Egyptians that he was the Creator of all things, and that no other god could stand before Him.

Now, before we get into the main points, three quick observations...

First, the Egyptian magicians can duplicate the first couple of plagues, but after that, they realize they're in over their heads, and they give up.

Secondly, after almost every plague, Pharaoh pleads with Moses to take the plague away, and Moses cries out to God, and the plague is stopped.

Third thing: On several occasions, when Pharaoh is feeling the pain of the plague, he promises to let the people go...but then when the plague stops, he changes his mind and hardens his heart again.

After the ninth plague, here's what it says in Exodus 10:27-29, ***“But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 28Pharaoh said to Moses, “Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die. 29Just as you say,” Moses replied. “I will never appear before you again.”” (NIV)***

You can feel the tension and animosity between Pharaoh and Moses...and you get the sense that something big is about to happen.

So, the question is...what could this possibly have to do with us? Some people read the plagues, and they say, "I love this. A God who brings swift justice on his enemies. This is great!" Other people say, "I hate this. In fact, it's dangerous to believe in a God who strikes down unbelievers. I don't like this at all." And I think both of those responses miss the point.

Remember the first time Moses went to Pharaoh, and he said, "The Lord says to let my people go." Do you remember what Pharaoh said? "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" And here's what I would say: **the plagues are God's answer to that question.**

If you think about it, we ask the same question all the time, don't we?

Because in the process of moving us from here to there, God calls us to obey him. He doesn't just pick us up and carry us against our will; He calls us to follow. For example, He calls us to forgive people who wrong us. That's not easy! He calls us to love people who hate us. He calls us to help the weak, the poor, and the socially outcast. That's countercultural!

He calls to use the gift of sex only within a marriage covenant. He may be calling you to a career change, or a ministry venture, or a financial decision. In

some way, to move you from where you are to where you need to be, God is probably calling you to a step of obedience right now. That's usually how it works! And the obvious question is, '**Who is this Lord, that I should obey him?**'

So here we go: three things that the plagues teach us about who God is.

I. **First, they teach us that His Identity is Unique.**

When Pharaoh says, 'Who is the Lord? Why should I obey him?' He's not speaking as an atheist. He's not saying, "Don't tell me there's a god!" Pharaoh was speaking as a pluralist. He believed there were many gods! "You've got your gods; we've got our gods; so why would you suggest that I start listening to the demands of your God? I don't know this God you're talking about."

In other words, Pharaoh would be very comfortable in America today. Right?

America is pluralistic and tolerant. And to suggest that one person's idea of God is better than anyone else's, or to suggest that someone needs to convert to your idea of god, is very offensive in our current culture.

And one of the big messages of the plagues is that Pharaoh was wrong. Did you notice, just before the first plague, God says to Pharaoh, by this you will know that I am the Lord. **Not "you will know that I am a pretty impressive god among many;" No, it's I am THE Lord, and there is none like me.**

The Egyptian people considered the Nile River to be a god. They considered the sun and the moon to be gods. And in the plagues, God shows his authority over the Nile River, and over the sun and over the moon.

You know what's really interesting? After the third plague, which is the plague of gnats, Exodus 8, verses 18-19 says, ***"But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, 19the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God."***

The magicians are beginning to realize that they're dealing with Someone more powerful than any of the demonic powers they dabble in. The magicians are in awe. But Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he wouldn't listen.

The first message of the plagues is that the God who brings these judgments is like no other power in the universe. His identity is completely unique. He's not just quantitatively better than the other gods; he's qualitatively in a class all by himself.

Remember at the burning bush, when Moses said, 'What if people ask me, 'Who sent you?' What should I tell them?' Remember God said, **"Tell them, 'I AM' sent you."**

That should take our breath away! He's not dependent on anyone or anything else for his existence. All things come from him. He's the uncreated Creator. He's the one and only true God.

I realize that for some of you, this is a hard concept. Because it feels overly narrow and exclusive, and you think, "Who am I to judge anyone else's concept of God?" All I'm saying is that if you're going to understand the God of the Bible, you can't get around this. This is not peripheral; it's central. It's number one in the Ten Commandments: **"You shall have NO other gods besides me."**

It's the first line in the Lord's Prayer when it says, **"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."** In other words, Lord, may your name be hallowed, holy, and set apart as utterly unique from all other names.

If you really want to understand the God of Moses, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you have to start here. There is no one in all the universe like Him.

If you are wrestling with some step of obedience, whether it's relational, spiritual, financial, or God's calling on your life, remember who is calling you!

Here's the second thing the plagues teach us about God:

II. His Judgments are Natural.

What do I mean by that?

Well, if you were God, and you wanted Moses to shock Pharaoh with the power of God, don't you think you could've done a better job? You could have stood before Pharaoh, and pointed to his guards, and have them fall dead. And then you'd look at Pharaoh, and say, "You're next." That would be convincing!

Or you could start shooting fireballs from your fingers everywhere. That would be impressive!

But God doesn't do it that way. In fact, if you think about it, the plagues are very natural things. All these things had happened before. Maybe not to this degree, but they had all happened. And then also, there's almost a logical, natural progression of the plagues. The Nile becomes polluted, which drives the frogs out of the river. And because of all the frogs, gnats and flies come. So it's this ecological disaster where the epidemics come, which destroy livestock and people's skin.

So, the question is: why did God choose to do it that way? Over the years some scholars have noted that this is an undoing of the biblical creation account.

Because in Genesis 1-2, the earth starts out formless and chaotic and dark. And God takes light...and he takes plants and animals and men and women and weather, and he weaves them together into this harmonious system, the Bible calls shalom.

But now in the plagues, the system is coming undone! Weather is destroying animals; insects are destroying plants. It's like nature is going crazy and devouring itself. Until you get all the way back to the beginning, when darkness is once again covering the face of the deep. Isn't that interesting?

Here's the point (and I'm going to quote Tim Keller here), here's what God is saying in the plagues: **"My power...my authority...is not arbitrary. It's not an exercise of naked power. Everything I tell you to do is natural. And every time you disobey me, the consequences are natural. When you disobey me, you unleash the forces of chaos, disorder and disintegration into your life and the lives of people around you."**

Think about it this way: imagine you're in the doctor's office, and your doctor says: 'I'm concerned about your heart, so listen: no more McDonald's drive-through for lunch, you have to cut down on fat and salt, start exercising, and no more ice cream every night.' And you say to your doctor, 'Are you on a power trip? Are you trying to control my life!' You wouldn't say that, right?

Why not? Well, because you already know that what the doctor is telling you is true, if you want to have a healthy body. If you say, "Who is this doctor, that I should obey him?" you'll probably have a heart attack down the road.

God's commands are just like that, but a thousand times more so. God created you and breathed the breath of life into you. And God's commands go beyond physical realities to the unseen spiritual world.

God says, "Forgive people who sin against you." If we refuse to do that, God doesn't send the flies of a thousand camels to take up residence in your house. But you'll start to experience the natural consequences, like bitterness, anger, hate. Your relationships will break down and become more guarded. You'll even experience physical breakdown from stress and unforgiveness.

God says, 'sex is reserved for one man and one woman joined together in holy matrimony.' What happens if you disregard God's plans...oh I don't know, sexual transmitted diseases, broken relationships, and a whole lot more.

God says, "Honor me with your finances. Tithe, and give generously to the poor and needy." If we refuse to do that, God doesn't say, "I'm going to blow up your car and burn your house down! That'll teach you!"

No, but you'll start to experience if you hold tightly to your wealth, you'll become more focused on yourself. You'll become less sensitive to others. You'll become less content with what you have, and you'll become more insecure and anxious about your future.

What I'm trying to say is that the consequences of disobedience are very natural. When we respond like Pharaoh, and we move away from God's will, we're unleashing the forces of chaos and disintegration into our lives, because we've moved ourselves out from under the protective hand of God.

Now, even if you accept all that, there's still a piece missing. Because you might say, "Okay I'll obey God, so my life doesn't fall apart!" And so, you live in fear, cringing before God, so He won't make your life miserable. **[story of Job]**

But that wouldn't be an accurate view of who God is...so you must hear this last thing the plagues teach us. Here it is:

II. His Passion is to Save.

If you asked most people, "What was the purpose of the plagues for the people of Israel?" they would say, 'Well, it was to set God's chosen people free. from slavery!' So most people recognize that even though the plagues were a form of judgment, they resulted in freedom for the Israelites. A good result.

If you asked people, 'Okay. What was the purpose of the plagues for the Egyptians?' They'd probably say, "Egypt was grossly idolatrous.

Egypt was brutal and bloodthirsty. Egypt was arrogant and stubborn. They deserve this type of punishment. God wants to make them squirm, and suffer.

Look a little closer. Every time God was about to unleash a plague, you know what he did. He warned them. In fact, before the seventh plague, the plague of hail, God says, ***"This is about to happen, so get your animals and your slaves out of the field! Get them to shelter!"***

And it says some of the Egyptians believed and got their animals and slaves to safety. So even in God's judgment, you can see his heart to provide a way out-to be saved from the judgment.

And one more thing: there's a place in chapter nine where God says to Pharaoh, "Look, by now, I could have destroyed you and your whole country. But I've raised you up so that my name will be proclaimed in all the earth.'

In other words, this thing that's happening will become part of a story that millions of people will hear, and they'll have the opportunity to open their life to me and experience my salvation.

But all through these judgments, Pharaoh kept hardening his heart.

Key Takeaway: A hard heart will face increasing pressure from a good God.

Jesus told us there are different kinds of soil in our heart. There's **hard** soil. There's the **shallow** soil. There's **thorny** soil. And then there's the **good** soil. When the seed comes into the good soil it receives it and produces a crop; thirty-fold, sixty-fold, even one hundred-fold.

What kind of soil do you have? Is it hard? Pharaoh's heart was hard, and God had to keep bringing more pressure and more pressure. And the pressure comes from a good God. Why? Because God wants you to respond to Him.

So, are the plagues judgments? Yes. But even in judgment, there's a redemptive purpose. God uses the judgments to save people, to save the Israelites...to save some of the Egyptians...and through these epic events, to bring salvation to countless people.

Some of you have friends or family members who are experiencing the natural fallout from their rebellion against God. Their life is disintegrating.

Or some of you are experiencing that fallout. And I'm praying people will start to view the suffering they're experiencing as God's mercy to wake them up and turn to God. Wouldn't that be an awesome outcome?

And all of this gets back to the original questions: Who is this God that we should obey Him? How is God different from every other god? What is the thing that sets him apart?

The final plague that we looked at today was like the ultimate reversal of creation, the light was gone, and now there is a darkness that can be felt.

Centuries later the same thing would happen again. It says in Matthew 27 that when Jesus hung on the cross, darkness came over the land. The earth shook and rocks split. In a sense, all the plagues of God fell on Jesus. There was darkness and chaos; blood and water flowed from his side. Jesus was disintegrating before people's eyes. All the flourishing and wholeness and peace that Jesus had when He walked through life was ripped away from him, because he was cut off from his Father.

And here's where this becomes good news: Jesus experienced all of that, so we don't have to. Does that make sense? The plagues remind us that God is a holy God, who judges sin. But Jesus took our sin on his shoulders, and He took the plagues of God's judgment in our place, so we don't have to.

This is what makes our God unique. This is what makes him different from any other concept of god: He's not a judge who gives out the rules, and then watches you fail, and crushes you.

He's the judge who came down to bear your judgment for you. So, here's the good news: when you look at the cross, and you say, "Yes, I believe and I receive what you've done for me," you become accepted by God. And as you

continue to walk in faith and trust and obedience to God, instead of plagues, the shalom of God starts to work in your life.

I'm not saying that if you trust and follow Jesus, everything will go perfect in your life not at all. **[Go back to Job for a minute, remember that everything that happened to him was because of his obedient life]**

You might have sickness, trouble, and even tragedy. But on the inside, in the core of your being something beautiful will be happening. Outwardly, you might be wasting away, but inwardly, you're being renewed day by day.

Instead of disintegrating as a person, you'll become more integrated and develop wholeness. Because of Jesus, we get blessing instead of plagues.

CONCLUSION: Who is this Lord, that I should obey him?

[Play 3:19 Youtube clip of SM Lockridge "That's My King" \[video or audio\]](#)

His identity is unique, He's the one true God. His judgments are natural, so when you push against Him you experience disintegration. And his passion is to save, which he ultimately did by sending Jesus to come and die in our place.

Here's my closing question: What would it mean to you, right now, to obey the Lord? Is there a step of faith that God is calling you to take? Where God is saying, "I want to bring you from here to there, from that place in your life that is disintegrating to that place of wholeness and blessing?"

Maybe you're like Pharaoh, and your heart has always been hard. But through your life experience, and through the preaching of the Word of God today, your heart is being softened. And you're ready to put your faith in Christ?

Or maybe you're a believer, but you've been resisting God. You're like the prodigal son, you ran away from your Father, and you're trying to make life work without him. But you can see your life disintegrating. Maybe not frogs and gnats and flies, but things are falling apart, and you know it. And God is calling you back to himself.

Whatever that step is, don't do it out of fear or duty or obligation. Do it because you're in awe of a mighty God who chooses to show you His love and mercy, because He is a loving Heavenly Father.

