

Session Eighty: God Works to Deliver His People from Egypt

Exodus 5:1-12:30

Theme: “Flexing His Muscle”

Key Point:

God, whose mighty power rescued His people from Egypt and also rescued us from the power of Satan, also enable us to confess in faith, “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Objectives:

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word, we will:

- 1) describe how God “flexed His muscle” in order to deliver His people from Egypt;
- 2) confess our ignorance and defiance of God and His will;
- 3) praise God for the deliverance He provided us from sin, death, and the power of the devil through His Son’s life, death, and resurrection.

Introduction:

The phrase *flexing his muscle* may describe a physiological event or the way a person acts when confronted with a difficult situation.

1. When might it be necessary or advantageous to “flex” your muscle?
2. Describe a time when you “flexed your muscle.” What was the result?

In today’s lesson we witness God “flexing His muscles” in order to deliver His people from Egypt. As you read the events leading up to the Exodus, think about how God has flexed His muscle on your behalf in order to rescue you from sin and death.

Study

Reading the Text:

God’s plan for Moses and the Israelites begins to unfold—but not without obstacles. In Fact, Moses’ first address to Pharaoh seems to make matters worse; Pharaoh adds to his slaves’ load by forcing them to gather their own straw, a necessary binder for the clay bricks used in Pharaoh’s building projects. Far from being a hero, Moses is rebuked by his own people (Exodus 5:1-21).

Nevertheless, God’s salvation is being accomplished. Pharaoh’s sterner measures were probably necessary motivation for the Israelites to leave Egypt when the opportunity finally came (since even afterward they often wished to return; see 14:11-12; 16:3; 17:3; Numbers 14:2-

4; 20:2-5). And God immediately speaks to Moses, reassuring him of His covenant with the people (Exodus 6:2-8). As He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so with these children of Israel—He will be their God and they will be His chosen people. God reveals that His relationship with them will be more personal than it was with the patriarchs, for He has invited this young nation to call Him by His personal name, Yahweh, I AM (English translation, the LORD). Surely He will redeem them from bondage by flexing His muscles! (6:6).

The redemption takes place by means of ten plagues: (1) the Nile turned to blood (7:14-25); (2) frogs covering the land (8:1-15); (3) gnats (or, possibly, lice or mosquitoes, 8:16-19); (4) flies (most likely a large biting variety, 8:20-32); (5) death of the livestock (perhaps by a disease like anthrax, 9:1-7); (6) boils (large, infectious sores, 9:8-12); (7) hail (9:13-35); (8) Locust (a dreaded pestilence in that region even today, 10:1-20); (9) darkness (10:21-29); and (10) the death of the firstborn (11:1-10, 12:29-30).

Naturalistic explanations are often offered for the plagues (e.g., an extraordinary Nile flood and its aftermath). The text certainly allows such possibilities. However, the text is emphatic that God was actively bringing about each plague at the moment of His decree (7:15-17; 8:9-10). Each plague was a miracle of God.

It is also significant that many of the plagues were directed toward the mythical gods honored by the Egyptians. For example, the Egyptians worshiped the Nile River (whom they believed was a god named Hopi), a frog (as the goddess, Heqt), and a bull-god (Apis). Thus when the Nile water became blood, when frogs over-ran the land and then died suddenly, and when the livestock perished, it demonstrated Yahweh's power over these false gods. Climactically, the ninth plague, darkness, warned the Egyptians that their chief deity, the sun god, Amon-Ra, was helpless to save them from the God of Israel.

The power of the plagues was overwhelming. At first, Pharaoh's magicians were able—no doubt by Satan's doing—to mimic God's signs (7:11-12; 7:22; 8:7). Yahweh, however, always maintained the upper hand (7:12). By the third plague God ceased to permit the imitations, finally putting the magicians to public humiliation (9:11). Moreover, the Lord left no doubt that it was Israel's God at work, conspicuously sparing His own people from the suffering (8:22-23; 9:4-7; 9:26; 10:23; 11:7). Eventually Pharaoh's own advisors and all the Egyptians were willing to submit to Yahweh, Moses, and the Israelites (8:19; 10:7; 11:2-3).

Why, then, would Pharaoh not yield? If, as is likely, these events took place in 1447-1446 B.C., the Pharaoh would have been Amenhotep II. This young king, who had ascended to the throne three years earlier at age 18, was the badly spoiled son of Hatshepsut's step-son, Thutmose III. Obviously, he was a stubborn young man.

Yet there is more to Pharaoh's resistance. God hardened his heart (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10). Why? To display His power as a warning for the good of the Egyptians as well as for the encouragement and liberation of Israel (7:3-5). God did not want to sacrifice Pharaoh; God did not desire his destruction. Indeed, God desires to save all people (1 Timothy 2:4)! In reality, God

made His demands upon Pharaoh as reasonable as possible; Moses' initial request was only that Pharaoh grant the people temporary leave to worship (Exodus 5:1-3).

Unfortunately for him, Pharaoh refused God's demands. Pharaoh's heart was hardened *before* God acted against him (7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:7). Before God actively hardened Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his own (8:15, 32; 9:34). This is the danger of resisting God. While the Lord earnestly gives forgiveness and life to everyone in His Word and Sacraments, those who steadfastly refuse the gift He may finally harden. (Those who fear that God has hardened their hearts can be sure that God has not, because that very fear is certain evidence of God working in the heart. A truly hardened heart is always totally unconcerned about God's Word and will.)

Pharaoh's resistance could only be crushed by the ultimate plague, the death of the firstborn son in every house of Egypt (11:1-6). Remarkably, such a terrible judgment gave occasion for the most dramatic act of deliverance in the Old Testament (12:1-30). While the angel of death brought devastating punishment upon sin, his passing over the homes of the faithful vividly expressed God's solution for sin and death. The Old Testament offers no clearer picture of the salvation God gives in Christ Jesus than in the "Passover."

The image of Christ in the Passover is vivid. Every Israelite family was to observe the historic night with a special meal of a spotless male lamb (12:5). Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), was spotless, without sin. The blood of the Passover lamb was to be spread on the doorposts and over the lintel (Exodus 12:7); the vertical posts and the horizontal lintel can remind us of the shape of a cross. Only bread without yeast was to be eaten at the meal (12:8); cleansing the house of leaven symbolizes the washing away of sin, just as Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Above all, when the angel of death saw the lamb's blood on the door, he would pass over, sparing the house (Exodus 12:13); the blood of Christ saves us from eternal death (1 Peter 1:18-21).

For generations to come, this Passover meal would remind believers of Israel that someday their Savior would come as the final Passover Lamb. In the meantime, it marked the mighty act that would at long last free them from slavery.

Discussing the Text:

- 1). How did God flex His muscle in each plague? What do His actions reveal about Himself?
- 2). How did the plagues challenge Pharaoh's belief in the power of his gods?
- 3). Compare and contrast the actions of the Israelites in Exodus 5:19-21 and 12:27b-28. How do you account for this change?
- 4). How does Passover foreshadow the person and work of Jesus?

Apply:

Ultimately, God will bring His purpose to completion for all people, whether for destruction (their stubborn choice) or for salvation (God's gracious gift). In the beginning, Pharaoh proudly asserted, "I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). By the end of the lesson, he knew the Lord's power only too well and begged the Israelites to leave (12:31). The price of Pharaoh's resistance, though, was the devastation of his kingdom.

Many people live in ignorance of God. Others openly defy His power. But the day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the almighty Lord of the universe (Philippians 2:10-11). No one can resist God forever. Everyone will be brought into submission in the end. For those who have remained in opposition, this will mean eternal suffering in hell.

Such a destination, however, is not God's desire for anyone. God wishes to us His almighty power for the good—the eternal salvation—of every soul. The overwhelming power of the plagues brought Israel out of Egypt. God's power to kill also revealed His mercy to save, as He protected the Israelites from the angel of death. This same mercy He has extended to everyone through His own Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. As we trust in the Lord, His mighty power will be at work to save us from every day's dangers, frustrations, and difficulties—and especially from our sins.

In studying this lesson, we become aware that we may not trifle with God, for He is the Lord of our lives. But above all, we know that the Lord of the universe wields awesome power for us!

- 1). What is the spiritual outcome for those who live in ignorance of God? For those who openly defy Him?
- 2). What did the children of Israel do to deserve the deliverance God provided them? What have we done to deserve the deliverance God has provided us?
- 3). Compare and contrast the Lord's Supper with the Passover meal.
- 4). In Colossians 2:16-17 St. Paul says that the Passover and other Old Testament festivals were a shadow of the things that were to come. In what ways is a *shadow* fitting imagery?
- 5). How can and do you praise God for flexing His muscle on your behalf to deliver you from sin and death?
- 6). How does the Lord continue to flex His muscle in your life today?

Catechism Connection:

Review the First Article of the Apostles' Creed and Martin Luther's explanation in the opening for Session I.

- 1). During recent years Christians have experienced terrorist attacks, war, hurricanes, earthquakes, forest fires, and other tragedies. Yet, Luther assures us that God "defends me

against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.” How can we believe Luther’s words? See also Romans 8:18-39.

2). In Psalm 73 the author (Asaph) tells about questions he had regarding God’s care of the righteous. How did his perspective change when he “entered the sanctuary of God” (verse 17)? What assurances for us do you find in verses 18-28?