

“From Fact to Faith”  
 Exodus 7:8-10:29  
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Do you merely believe **in** God or do you **believe** God?

Most of the world believes in God or gods and much of the world believes in the God but the question is do you believe God?

It is one thing to think God exists, it is quite another to trust him, to truly trust him day to day with the stuff of our lives.

The evidence that many, even many who attend church, believe in God but don't **believe** God is seen in the way their lives are lived.

- Their priorities are earthly and selfish rather than God's kingdom and altruistic.
  - Their morality is culturally conditioned and relativistic rather than biblically based and objective.
  - Their charity is opportunistic and calculated rather than missional and sacrificial.
- They believe in God but they don't trust him with life.
- They may have modified some of their outward actions and habits to conform to their sense of what an acceptable Christian does but their hearts are unchanged.
  - They are still in control of their jobs, their relationships, their leisure time and their money.
  - They suspicion they can't control their eternal destiny but not for lack of trying.

They believe in God, but they don't believe God.

In our study of the book of Exodus we come to the time when God is about to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and into a land of their own – the fulfillment of promises, made and repeated, for nearly 500 years.

The problem is that the promise has been obscured by nearly 400 years of slavery.

- Can you imagine a father telling his 10 year-old son about the promise that God had made 399 years earlier?
- Can you imagine a son hearing that promise and then watching his father and grandfather as they are marched out to the stone quarries as slaves?
- Can you imagine the boy's struggle to believe the promise when all the evidence points to the disappearance of God and the futility of faith?

Who of us, living under much less extreme conditions, has not felt something of that same struggle of faith?

The descendants of Jacob, also known as Israel, are called the Israelites and they probably numbered nearly 2 million men, women and children (Cf. Exodus 12:37) – the population of the greater Denver metropolitan area.

Through the centuries the people of Israel had become numerous enough to take the next step in their history under God's direction but they weren't ready.

What we see in the text before us today is God's preparation of the people to not just believe in him but to believe him sufficiently to stake their lives on him – to trust him in spite of the evidence.

Freedom is not an easy thing to manage.

It is one thing to be freed and quite another to know what to do with freedom.

When he was about three, my son Paris, decided to run away from home.

He packed a few things, went out the front door and we found him... seated on the front porch. He wasn't ready for freedom.

The people of Israel aren't ready.

They believe in God, but they don't yet believe God.

The sermon this morning is without its ending.

I don't mean it is endless, though my sermons might seem that way to some, but I do mean that the ending of this sermon must wait for next week or the following.

How does God prepare his people to believe him?  
 How does God convince them to trust him?

To the Israelites, God may have seemed absent in the past, but he is going to break into their present in such powerful ways that some of them will know not only that he is but that he can be trusted.

Last week, I showed you what the Bible says is **the reason for these events.**

Both by the judgment on Egypt through the plagues AND by the mercy shown to the Israelites by leading them out of their slavery **God will bring glory to himself.**

To understand what that means and doesn't mean, please see last Sunday's sermon.

As I said, the way God will show his glory is by both judgment and mercy.

And so God says in Exodus 7:5 and repeated several times, "And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD..."

By the time that Israel leaves Egypt, the Egyptians certainly know that God is THE God.

But I contend that while the Egyptians' acknowledgment of God as God is certainly an objective here, the greater objective is that Israel may know that the LORD is God.

Listen to the way God says it to Moses regarding the Israelites: Exodus 6:7 "Then you (you Israelites) will know that I am the LORD **your** God..."

This knowledge is not the grudging acquiescence of Pharaoh and the Egyptians but the knowledge of relationship, of intimacy – "our" God.

That is repeated again in chapter 10.

10:1-2 "I... perform these miraculous signs of mine among (the Egyptians) **that you may tell your children and grandchildren** how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and **that you may know that I am the LORD.**"

From the perspective of hindsight, we know that the Egyptians, as I said, came, only grudgingly, to the acknowledgement of God as THE God but they didn't believe God, as in trust him.

We also know that most of the adult Israelites, while they believed in God, did not believe God.

Getting ahead of where we are in the story, we know that they grumbled their way across the desert and refused to enter the Promised Land because of their lack of trust in God.

Do you remember who it was that God gave the privilege of entering the Promised Land?

Only those who were under 20 when they left Egypt.

Now look again at 10:1-2 "I... perform these miraculous signs of mine among (the Egyptians) that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and **that you may know that I am the LORD.**"

**I don't think it is a stretch at all to suggest that the primary audience of the miracles of the Exodus were the children of the Israelites, their children and even us to this day, 3500 years later.**

For 1500 years, until the cross and resurrection event of Jesus, the Exodus event was the quintessential demonstration of the presence and power of God so that his people might believe him.

I want you to join me in reliving those days and capturing something of the impact those events had on them and that God expects those events to have on us.

It is very interesting to me that the story is told in such prosaic form – no fantastic language, just a straightforward telling of the what God did.

We don't have eyewitness accounts where the people cry about their favorite lamb getting pummeled by the hail or tell how frightening the darkness was, or describe in medical detail the boils on their babies.

Future generations were just to hear the basic unvarnished truth and realize it is their God who has such power and uses it for the sake of his people.

May God's Spirit impress the same on us to the end that we not only believe in his existence and power (as the Egyptians grudgingly came to accept) but also that we believe him, trusting him with our lives.

So I'd like to tell the story, largely the way the Scripture does. I will leave out some details that I wish to pick up on another time. For reasons I stated earlier, I want to tell it through the eyes and experience of a 10-year-old Israelite boy – one of those under-age-20 children to which the text refers.

"I've never known anything else than being the son of a slave. My grandfather was a slave before my father, and his father before him.  
From what I'm told, we've been slaves for 400 years.

But it wasn't always that way. Many, many years ago, our forefathers were a free people. And I am reminded every Sabbath that the promise of God is that we will be a free people again.

I believe that but probably only in the way that you believe something you've been told over and over again. I don't think I actually expect to see it happen – it's just nice to believe it.

But one day, not that long ago, my father and the other men began to get excited about the idea of escaping Egypt and going to that land promised to us so long ago.

It turns out that one of the Princes of Egypt is in fact a Hebrew, one of us. This man, named Moses, returned from somewhere and is promising to lead us out of Egypt.

But the excitement turned to disappointment pretty quickly when Pharaoh flat-out refused to free us and instead made it harder than ever for my father and the others.

7:8-13

But then, just a month ago, or so, I heard my father talking again about this Moses and what he was doing.

I couldn't tell if my father was excited or if he thought it was all just foolishness.

But one night he came home saying he had heard that this Moses actually went again to the Pharaoh demanding that we be set free.

And when Pharaoh asked to see some sign that Moses had any authority to be demanding anything, Moses' brother Aaron, who was with him, threw down his shepherd's staff and it turned into a terrifying snake.

Well Pharaoh called his magicians to match Moses and they did, they threw down their staffs and those staffs became snakes too.

But what was fun to hear was when my father said that without so much as a word by anyone, the snake of Moses and Aaron swallowed up all the other snakes.

My father smiled when he told it – the best Pharaoh had to offer was no match for our God.

You have to wonder what the old Pharaoh thought of all that.

But he wouldn't let us go.

7:14-24

I thought that was the end of the whole story.

But boy was I wrong.

The very next day, early in the morning, everyone was scared and excited all at the same time.

The Nile River, the river that makes our lives possible, the river that waters the land and makes the crops grow, had turned to blood.

The fish in the river died and the stink from the river was terrible.

The Egyptians couldn't find water anywhere because even the water in their jars and buckets turned to blood.

They had to dig wells in order to get any water fit to drink.

That night Father told us that God had done it through Moses.

Moses told the Pharaoh that God was going to punish him because he refused to let us go free.

And then Moses told his brother Aaron to stretch out his staff.

And the Nile River turned to blood.

The river that Pharaoh said he had made and that belonged to him, the river that the Egyptians worshipped, our God just took over and Pharaoh could do nothing about it – he just walked away.

7:25-8:15

It was a week before I heard or saw anything else.

Things were finally getting back to normal.

I thought maybe it was all over.

Then older kids came running from all over saying the same thing.

"Frogs!"

That may sound like fun to most 10-year-olds but this was not a couple of frogs that you chase through the grass.

There were frogs everywhere.

They were in every room; they were in the beds, in the kitchens, in the ovens, and covering the places where people cook.

Not a few, but millions of frogs.

That night, we could hardly wait for Father to get home to tell us what he had heard.

Yes, it was Moses again.

He waited seven days and then he went to Pharaoh again to tell him to let us go free or he would plague the country with frogs.

And that is exactly what Moses did and the frogs came from the Nile by the millions.

The Pharaoh's magicians made frogs come up too but Pharaoh knew there was a difference between what they could do and what Moses and done.

Father said the frog represented one of the Egyptian gods - a god that allowed animals to have lot's of babies.

Our God was controlling their gods.

This time Pharaoh had to admit that Moses' God must exist.

He asked Moses to pray to his God that the frogs would go away – he had to ask our God to stop his god.

And then for the first time he promised that if the frogs went away, he'd let us go.

So the next day, Moses prayed and the frogs died.

There were so many of them that they were heaped into tall piles that stunk as badly as the bloody river had.

But Father told us that as soon as the frogs were gone, the Pharaoh changed his mind and said he wouldn't let us go.

8:16-19

When that happened, Father said, Moses told his brother Aaron to take his staff and hit the dust on the ground.

Not only did our God have control of the water but now he showed that he also has control over the land.

Aaron hit the ground and all the dust throughout the whole country turned into gnats.

Have you ever been caught in a swarm of bugs?

They're all over you, in your eyes, up your nose and in your ears.

You think you're going to go crazy if you can't get away from those things.

Well, Pharaoh's magicians immediately tried to match the power of Moses but they couldn't.

And even they had enough sense to realize that Moses wasn't using magic; he had some kind of divine power that they couldn't match.

They even told the Pharaoh that this was the “finger of God.”

Not only did Moses’ God exist but Moses’ God was in Egypt and in fact, he was even in their very homes, in the palace of the Pharaoh; there was no place that our God could be denied. But old Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he wouldn’t listen.

8:20-32

The next couple of days seemed normal to us.

The frogs and the bugs were gone.

We didn’t realize anything had happened until Father came home that second night.

He told us how Moses had gone to the Pharaoh the day before threatening him again that if he didn’t let us go free, this next day swarms of biting insects would cover every part of where the Egyptians lived but none of where we lived.

And that is exactly what happened – insects everywhere on the ground, in the air, and in their houses.

Insects that bit them. (Psalm 78:45)

These were worse than the gnats.

Again, I ask, have you ever been in the middle of a swarm of mosquitoes or hornets.

Imagine if they were everywhere and you couldn’t get away from them.

Our God has control of the water, the land and now the air.

Father told us that as soon as the flies appeared the Pharaoh quickly called for Moses and told Moses that we could go worship our God but we had to do it here in Egypt.

Moses told him we had to go out of the country and Pharaoh said okay but we shouldn’t go far and please pray for us that your God will remove the insects.

Moses said he would pray but that Pharaoh had better not change his mind again.

But as soon as the insects were gone, Pharaoh did change his mind and refused to let us go.

9:1-7

It wasn't many days later that Father came home with another story but this one we knew something about before he told us.

The first clue we had to something else terrible happening to the Egyptians was when some of the Pharaoh's men came around inspecting our barns and pastures.

We kids kept asking questions until we got the idea that something had happened to their cows and sheep.

Well that night Father told us what had happened.

Moses went to Pharaoh again and told him to let us go or all the cattle of the Egyptians would die but not our cattle.

And sure enough the next day it happened – all their cattle died.

That's why the Pharaoh had sent men to see if ours were still alive.

But in spite of seeing what had happened, in spite of seeing that our God has the power of death in his hands and can decide what dies and what doesn't, Pharaoh still refused to let us go.

9:8-12

Father said that as soon as Moses and Aaron heard that the Pharaoh changed his mind again, God told them to throw soot into the air.

They did, and swelling, spreading, open sores appeared on all the people and the animals of the Egyptians.

This time the magicians didn't even try to match Moses' power because they were covered with the sores.

But Father said, in spite of this painful attack on their very bodies, demonstrating God's power not just over nature but even over the Pharaoh's own body, Pharaoh refused to give in.

I wondered how much it would take for the Pharaoh to get the message.

I had no idea what would happen next but I was beginning to wonder if all of Moses' efforts would accomplish anything.

Actually I didn't think of that – I heard my father say it.

9:13-35

Again, it was a couple of days later when we got the word of what happened next.

Moses again went to Pharaoh and warned him to let us go or hail would destroy everything.

In fact Moses warned Pharaoh to tell his people to get under cover the next day and get their cattle under cover or the hail would kill them.

And not so incidentally, that terrible hail will fall everywhere except where the Israelites live.

Some of Pharaoh's people feared what Moses said and brought their cattle into the barns but many did not.

The next day it hailed like it had never hailed before, ever in Egypt's history.

Even though it did not hail where we lived we could hear the thunder and see lightening that went along with the worst storm ever.

It beat down every living thing left out in the open and it stripped every tree.

All the crops that had leaves or heads of grain were destroyed.

Have you see what just small hail can do to flowering plants.

Now imagine the size of hail that can kill animals and people.

That's what happened.

This time of year the Egyptians always worship their god Min, the god of the harvest.

Did anyone notice that our God is more powerful?

This time the Pharaoh called for Moses and admitted that he had sinned, that the LORD was right and he was wrong and that he would let the people go if Moses would pray for the hail to stop.

And so Moses prayed and the hail stopped but once again Pharaoh changed his mind.

It's amazing isn't it – the Pharaoh now knows that our God is alive, that our God is more powerful than his gods, that our God can control everything about nature – he can instantaneously turn water into blood, create millions of reptiles and insects, he can start and stop diseases, and he can kill any animal or human anytime he chooses – and Pharaoh even admits that he is wrong, but he still refuses to yield to him.

10:3-20

Now, every day we could hardly wait for our father to get home to tell us what happened next.

And we weren't disappointed.

Once again Moses went to Pharaoh and threatened him to let us go or this time locusts would come and eat every living plant on the ground.

They delivered their message and left.

Have you ever seen what billions of insects can do to a field of crops?

After the hailstorm, all that was left were the new crops that hadn't yet leaved out.

If the locusts got them the Egyptians would starve.

Even the Pharaoh's officials understood that and pleaded with the Pharaoh to give in.

So Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron back in and said, okay, they could leave but only the men.

And then the Pharaoh had his men force Moses and Aaron out of the palace.

So the Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand over Egypt and an east wind blew across the land and by the next morning the ground was black with locusts.

Every plant was eaten, any leaves or fruit still on the trees after the hail was eaten and everything green was devoured.

Pharaoh quickly realized he had doomed his country and himself and he called for Moses.

Once more he said he had sinned against Moses' God and would Moses please forgive him and pray to his God to remove the locusts.

Moses prayed, the locusts were blown away but the Pharaoh changed his mind for the 8<sup>th</sup> time.

10:21-29

By now we were all sensing that something even more terrible was about to happen.

We could see that what started out with a snake eating other snakes had grown so much more serious.

Now the lives of all the people of Egypt were threatened.

What was next?

We didn't have to wait long to find out.

Have you ever been out in a woods at night when the clouds covered the sky so there were no stars, no moon, absolutely no light, and it was so black you couldn't see anything, not even your own hand in front of your face?

That's what happened next.

Moses' stretched out his hand to the sky and it became totally dark.

And it wasn't only for a few minutes until someone could get a lantern lit.

It was totally dark.

I don't know why, but even though we had light in our houses in our part of the country, the Egyptians were not able to get light of any kind.

Can you imagine?

For a people that worship the sun this kind of total darkness was a greater threat than anything that had happened before.

In fact for any of us who think of nothing more certain than that the sun will rise in the morning this was an awesome display of our God's power.

It seemed that Pharaoh had reached the end of his rope because after three days of this, and no assurance that it would ever end, he called Moses and told him he and all the people of Israel could go.

But it seems that Pharaoh was still stubbornly refusing to completely give in.

He demanded that all the cattle of the Israelites be left behind.

Moses of course refused.

And at that, in spite of the blood, the insects, the hail, the sores, the locusts and now the darkness, Pharaoh became enraged and said that if he ever saw Moses again, Moses would die!

This was a change that none of us expected.

Throughout these days my father alternated between anticipation and discouragement.

At times he seemed confident that this would be the time that the Pharaoh would give in.

But the longer it went on and the more stubborn the Pharaoh seemed to be, my father wondered out loud if it was hopeless.

And then this happened.

Not only did the Pharaoh refuse to let us go, but also he refused to ever see Moses again.

How would we ever be allowed to leave if there was no opportunity to talk to the Pharaoh?

Hopeless, is what many became.

But what about all we have seen these past weeks?

- Our God has power over all the forces of nature.
- Our God has the power of life and death.
- Our God controls even the sun, moon and stars.
- Our God can tease and manipulate the mightiest king on earth.

Can we believe him?

And now to us today:

- Have we seen enough to **believe** God, to trust him with **our** lives?
- What will it take for you to more than believe **in** him?
- Did your God do all these things in Exodus?
- Can your God best anything that comes against you?

- Can your God care for you?