

## God's Irresistible Dance – A Reflection on Exodus 7-9

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Exodus 7 begins like this:

The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. <sup>2</sup> You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land. <sup>3</sup> But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup> When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. <sup>5</sup> The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them.” <sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. <sup>7</sup> Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

And the rest of Exodus 7-9 follows that pattern. Moses with quiet strength, emanating power to the tune of Aaron’s prophesy. Pharaoh refusing again and again and God’s signs and wonders wreaking havoc through the physical and symbolic Egyptian world. And by the way, Moses and Aaron were old.

Think of the prologue we just read as the front matter of a cd or record—giving us the titles of the songs, their length, and their order—and the remainder of the text as the songs themselves. We hear the music of God’s justice and deliverance. The text paints a picture of God the iconoclast, dancing in Egypt, unbound by any god or power or force. After centuries of silence, God’s energies come through the presence of two simple people, seemingly innocuous to the status quo, but once God’s will flows out of Aaron’s mouth it becomes an irresistible and unstoppable force. God avenges the oppressed by a demonstration of his absolute freedom.

We are to understand that God’s choice of plagues were not accidental. The locusts and frogs and the Nile itself represented certain sacred features of the Egyptian worldview. The gods who governed these elements were helpless in the face of God’s will. More than that, it was God’s will that the sacred institutions of the powerful would be turned on their head. So it is not just God is absolutely free, but that God’s absolute freedom establishes him as the great iconoclast. He dances through Egypt, expressing his justice not in wrath but in pure irresistibility. I do not think it is sovereignty that is expressed here, it is freedom. It is the demonstration that no Egyptian god, including Pharaoh himself, can resist the song that God sings.

The question we must ask ourselves, as is any other text, is where we see ourselves. Are we the Pharaoh character—a sovereign over his world and, at the same time, like a dog who returns to his vomit? He really is a sympathetic character. He is the fool of the text, from the perspective of the omnipotent reader, but in our own lives we lack that transcendent perspective. We often fail to see when we are the fool in our own narrative. We learn to rely on the sovereignty of our own judgment but are undone by that same sense of self-sufficiency. We create the world in our own image, but God is not bound by that image.

Or are we like Moses and Aaron—the delegates from the oppressed, speaking on behalf of a power they do not fully grasp? On the one hand our own ground will also be overturned by

God's will. On the other hand, surely there is a way to be in step with God's dance. Undeniably here the side that God is on is the side of the people who he claims as his own, a people chosen, in part, because of their apparent weakness. Abraham the exile, Israel the slaves.

It is in this sense that I think the text speaks powerfully into our world. God's absolute freedom becomes expressed in our world through a great iconoclasm—the overturning of oppressive forms of convention for the sake of people who God claims as his own. It is certainly not critique of power itself, but rather a re-imagining of what power can be in our lives, in our culture, and especially in our churches. We are left with the task of discernment in light of this revision of power. What would it look like in our individual lives, our public worlds, and in the mission of our churches if we embraced the iconoclastic dance of God's absolute freedom? I will leave us with a picture of that dance from Acts:

- <sup>17</sup> 'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.
- <sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.
- <sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
- <sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
- <sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

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