

Dr. John Oswalt, Exodus, Session 5, Exodus 9-10

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Oswalt, Exodus, Session 5, Exodus 9-10, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. John Oswalt's lecture analyzes Exodus 9-10, focusing on the plagues inflicted upon Egypt. **He examines the plagues** not as mere natural events, but as **miracles distinguished by timing, distinction, and intensity**, highlighting God's power over nature and the Egyptian gods. **Oswalt explores Pharaoh's hardened heart**, the magicians' limitations, and the ultimate purpose of the plagues—to **reveal Yahweh's sovereignty** and challenge the worship of false gods. The lecture concludes by emphasizing the importance of choice and submission to God's will.

**2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Oswalt, Exodus, Session 5 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament →
Pentateuch → Exodus).**



**Oswalt_Exodus_Ses
sion05.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Oswalt, Exodus, Session 5, Exodus 9-10

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. John Oswalt's teaching on Exodus 9-10:

Briefing Document: Dr. John Oswalt on Exodus 9-10 (Plagues 5-9)

Introduction:

This briefing document summarizes Dr. John Oswalt's analysis of Exodus chapters 9 and 10, focusing on plagues five through nine. The central themes revolve around the nature of miracles, the sovereignty of God, the limits of magic, the problem of human pride, and the purpose of the plagues in revealing God's character and power. Oswalt emphasizes that these events are not merely historical occurrences, but have profound theological implications for understanding God and humanity.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Purpose of the Plagues: Discrediting False Gods:

- The plagues are specifically aimed at the gods of Egypt, targeting objects of their worship: animals (bull, ram, he-goat), plants, and ultimately the sun god Ra. This is to demonstrate that these gods have no real power.
- Oswalt notes that "the Egyptians worshipped the potent animals...which represent reproductive power... Then there were the plants, which seemed to have the power to rise from the dead."
- He emphasizes that Yahweh's intention is to reveal himself as the one true God, not just to punish Egypt.

1. The Nature of Miracles:

- Oswalt identifies three key elements that distinguish miracles from natural events: *timing* (occurring at the predicted moment), *distinction* (not happening everywhere), and *intensity*.
- He quotes C.S. Lewis: "God's miracles are never a destruction of nature, but a speeding up or a slowing down or a suspension." This means miracles are not a denial of natural law but God working through it.
- The focus is not on *how* the miracle happens but *when* and *where*, showing it is under God's control.

1. **God's Sovereignty and Pharaoh's Hardened Heart:**

- The text highlights the complex interplay of Pharaoh's choices and God's action in hardening Pharaoh's heart. Oswalt clarifies it's not an arbitrary act by God, but a culmination of Pharaoh's life of pride and unwillingness to acknowledge any authority above him. "It is the sum total of Pharaoh's whole life that brings him to this place where he's absolutely unwilling to admit that anybody has any authority over him."
- He points out that "If Pharaoh thinks he is free because he's a God, he's wrong. He is as contingent as anyone else on this planet. Only God, the I am, has absolute freedom."
- This underscores that God is absolutely sovereign, while also affirming human choice.

1. **Biblical Interpretation and Language:**

- Oswalt stresses that the Bible should be interpreted in its own terms and according to the ways in which its original audience used language. The word "all" does not necessarily mean every single one.
- He states, "It's pretty clear that all doesn't mean all. It does not mean every last one. But it does mean that all kinds of animals throughout the whole country, except for Goshen, there was no class of animal that was left out."
- He encourages studying the historical and cultural context to grasp the full meaning of the text.
- The Bible doesn't come to us in "timeless, placeless propositions", but in a historical context, which is a good thing.

1. **Limits of Magic and Demonic Power:**

- Initially, the Egyptian magicians could replicate the first two plagues, but then they could not. The third plague is when they are impacted, specifically by the boils. They go from being duplicators to sufferers.
- Oswalt emphasizes that "God permits magic, but it has its limits. And ultimately, it is all under his control."
- He connects this to Jesus's control over demons, and that the demonic world is under his control.

- The plagues demonstrate that what the world thinks is life-giving apart from God is death-dealing and Jesus then demonstrates the opposite by turning death into life.

1. **"No One Like Me" Statements and God's Character:**

- The plagues are accompanied by statements from God that declare "You will know that I am Yahweh," which Oswalt emphasizes is not just about God's label, but revealing his nature and character as the self-existent, free, and powerful "I AM."
- He traces the progression of these statements: "You will know that I am Yahweh," then "There is no one like Yahweh," and then, "None like me in all the earth". This progression emphasizes God's unique, transcendent, and universal power and nature.
- The question then arises, how did the Hebrews come to this conclusion about their god? Oswalt notes they themselves were surprised by it and did not want to believe this, that they were "religious numbskulls" who had this knowledge thrust upon them.

1. **God's Purpose and Human Choice:**

- God states his purpose for the plagues in Exodus 9:16. "To show my power and that my name might be proclaimed because of you through all the earth."
- Oswalt says: "Pharaoh, why do you exist? You exist so that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed because of you through all the earth. And, of course, that's exactly what has happened. Here we are tonight because of Pharaoh."
- God's purposes will be accomplished either "because of us or in spite of us." Humans have the choice to partner with God and participate in his purposes willingly or to have them accomplished through their destruction.
- Oswalt uses the analogy of the sun rising as a metaphor for God's judgment. "The same sun that sucks the life from the stubble will suck the pus out of that wound." The outcome is determined by who we are, stubble or wounded?

1. **God's Gracious Care and Appeal to the People:**

- Even within the plagues, God demonstrates gracious care by warning about the hail and offering a way to avoid its impact.

- God is seen to bypass Pharaoh, appealing directly to the Egyptian people, demonstrating the choice to obey or disobey, which is shown by those who feared the word of the Lord and those who did not.
- This highlights that God's intention is not simply to destroy, but also to bring people to repentance and faith.

1. **Pharaoh's Acknowledgment and Unrepentant Heart:**

- Pharaoh acknowledges his sin and that God is Yahweh, but does not genuinely repent. He only cares about the consequences of his sin.
- Oswalt points out, "Pharaoh doesn't say, well, I made a bad, poor value judgment. No, I sinned."
- His hard heart demonstrates the deep-seated nature of sin, an unwillingness to surrender control.

1. **The Problem of Pride and Bargaining with God:**

- Pharaoh's problem is ultimately pride, an unwillingness to bow his knee before God.
- People often try to bargain with God to maintain control of their lives while still receiving his blessings. Examples of bargaining include giving him some money, time, or even your children, but not everything.
- Oswalt shares the story of his own son who had to bow his knee before God, which mirrors the heart posture that Pharaoh refuses.

1. **Progression of Plagues and the Final Challenge:**

- The plagues progress from the Nile to the sun, moving up the pantheon of Egyptian gods.
- The plague of darkness is significant because it attacks the very source of life and worship, the sun god Ra. It's a direct challenge, with no warning, to show that even the sun is under God's control.

1. **Danger of Dictating to God:**

- Oswalt shares the story of Benedict Arnold who dictated to God and God granted his request. He highlights the danger of telling God to "just leave me alone" because He will.

- He stresses that when God is acting, that is the moment to say "yes, Lord," fully submitting to his will.

Conclusion:

Dr. Oswalt's teaching on Exodus 9-10 provides a rich theological understanding of the plagues, revealing God's character, sovereignty, and power. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and linguistic context of the text, recognizing the limits of magic, and acknowledging the profound problem of human pride.

Ultimately, the plagues serve as a revelation of the one true God, who demands submission and offers grace. The central takeaway is that God's purposes will be accomplished, and we each have the choice to be part of that willingly or in spite of ourselves.

4. Study Guide: Oswalt, Exodus, Session 5, Exodus 9-10

Exodus 9-10 Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. According to Oswalt, what are the three elements that distinguish a miracle from a natural event?
2. How does Oswalt describe the complexity of God hardening Pharaoh's heart?
3. Explain how the word "all" is used differently in the Bible, using the example of the livestock plague.
4. What are the three stages of the magicians' relationship to Moses, and what do these stages teach us about magic and God?
5. What was the significance of the death of the sacred bull of Ammon Ra in the context of the plagues?
6. What does Oswalt mean when he says the phrase, "I am the Lord," really means, "I am the I AM?"
7. Why did God not destroy Egypt in one blow, and what purpose did the plagues serve?
8. How did the Egyptians react to the warning about the hail?
9. Explain how Pharaoh's confession of sin and the hardening of his heart demonstrate the complexities of human choice.
10. Why does Oswalt argue that Pharaoh's problem was ultimately pride?

Short Answer Quiz - Answer Key

1. Oswalt says that the three elements that distinguish a miracle from a natural event are **timing**, **distinction**, and **intensity**. Miracles happen at the precise predicted moment, are localized, and exhibit an unusual degree of force.
2. Oswalt describes God hardening Pharaoh's heart as a complex process, not an arbitrary act. It is the culmination of Pharaoh's life choices and his unwillingness to acknowledge any authority above him, though God does bring Pharaoh to this point.

3. Oswalt explains that "all" in the Bible does not always mean every single one. In the livestock plague, it means **all kinds of animals** throughout the whole country, except for Goshen, but not necessarily *every* individual animal.
4. The magicians first **duplicated** the plagues, then they **could not duplicate** them, and finally they **suffered** from them, like all the Egyptians. This shows that while magic exists, it has limits, and that God is all-powerful and sovereign.
5. The death of the sacred bull of Ammon Ra demonstrates that **Yahweh, not the bull god**, is the true God. It shows that these gods of fertility and reproduction are not as powerful as they seem.
6. Oswalt says "I am the Lord" is not just a title, but really means "I am the I AM." This emphasizes God's **self-existent, free, and uncontingent nature** and that He is the source of everything.
7. God did not destroy Egypt in one blow, because he wanted to **show his power** and make his **name known** throughout all the earth. The plagues were designed to demonstrate that He is the God over all the false gods of Egypt.
8. The Egyptians reacted to the warning about the hail differently; **those who feared the Lord** heeded the warning and brought their livestock and slaves inside, and those who **ignored the Lord's warning** left them in the field, and those animals and people died.
9. Pharaoh acknowledges God, confesses his sin, but ultimately hardens his heart. This demonstrates that one can intellectually recognize God's power without surrendering to it, highlighting how sin often involves a stubborn pursuit of one's own way despite knowing it is wrong.
10. Oswalt argues that Pharaoh's problem was ultimately **pride**, an unwillingness to admit that anyone has the right to tell him what to do, highlighting that this is a universal problem which keeps people from a true relationship with God.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the progression of the plagues in Exodus 9-10 and discuss how they demonstrate God's power and purpose. Include an examination of the specific Egyptian gods the plagues target.
2. Discuss the relationship between Pharaoh's free will and God's sovereignty in the context of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. How does Oswalt's interpretation affect your understanding of divine justice?
3. Using examples from the text, discuss how Oswalt's interpretation of the Bible is both contextual and timeless. How does his emphasis on understanding the historical and cultural context enrich your understanding of the text?
4. Explain and give examples of how the themes of choice, obedience, and faith are portrayed in Exodus 9-10. What do these themes reveal about God's character and expectations of humanity?
5. Explore Oswalt's statement that "God's purposes are going to be realized either because of us or in spite of us." How does this idea relate to your own life, and what does it imply about God's relationship with humanity?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Miracle:** An event that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws. In the context of Exodus, miracles are characterized by their timing, distinction, and intensity.
- **Sovereignty:** God's supreme authority and power over all things. In Exodus, God's sovereignty is demonstrated through the plagues, showing he is above all other gods.
- **Hardening of the Heart:** A biblical concept that refers to an obstinate refusal to acknowledge or obey God, often as a result of one's own pride and choices, which the Bible notes that God facilitates.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Old Testament. Oswalt emphasizes it means "I am the I am," emphasizing God's self-existent and free nature.
- **Ammon Ra:** The Egyptian sun god, often depicted as a human with a falcon's head. The plague of darkness in Exodus is aimed at this god, demonstrating Yahweh's ultimate power.
- **Osiris:** The Egyptian god of the underworld and the afterlife, often represented by a mummy with a green complexion. He represents the yearly death and rebirth of plant life.
- **Plagues:** A series of divine acts inflicted upon Egypt to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites. They are designed to be judgments on the gods of Egypt, not just a curse on the people.
- **Pride:** An inflated sense of self-importance and an unwillingness to submit to God or any authority. This is identified by Oswalt as Pharaoh's key problem.
- **Foxhole Religion:** A term to describe people who turn to God during times of difficulty or danger with no intention of maintaining their faith.
- **Signs:** Miraculous events that demonstrate God's power and authority, and point to a greater truth or reality.

5. FAQs on Oswalt, Exodus, Session 5, Exodus 9-10, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Understanding Exodus Plagues (Chapters 9-10)

1. **What is the main purpose of the plagues in Exodus according to Dr. Oswalt's interpretation?** Dr. Oswalt argues that the plagues in Exodus are not merely displays of God's power, but are specifically aimed at discrediting the gods of Egypt. Each plague is targeted at something that the Egyptians worshipped - the Nile, animals (bulls, rams, goats representing reproductive power), plants (seen as having the power to rise from the dead), and ultimately, the sun god Ammon Ra. The plagues are intended to demonstrate Yahweh's supremacy over these false deities.
2. **How does Dr. Oswalt differentiate between natural events and miracles, and how do these principles apply to the plagues?** According to Dr. Oswalt, three elements distinguish a miracle: *timing*, *distinction* (not happening everywhere), and *intensity*. He uses the example of the Nile turning to blood. If a natural event of red clay flooding occurred at the exact moment Moses commanded it with his staff, this would still be considered a miracle. The key is the divinely controlled timing, scope, and severity of the event, not just how it physically occurred. The plagues fit this criteria as they occur on cue, targeted in scope, and are intense in nature.
3. **The Bible says that both Pharaoh hardened his heart and God hardened Pharaoh's heart. How should this be understood?** Dr. Oswalt explains that it's not a simple case of God arbitrarily hardening Pharaoh's heart. Rather, it's the culmination of Pharaoh's lifetime of choices and refusal to submit to any authority. God uses Pharaoh's choices and life to bring him to a point of unyielding opposition. The Bible underlines the complexity of how human choices and God's will interact. Pharaoh's perceived freedom as a god is shown to be untrue as he is subject to God's greater power.

4. **The text says that all the livestock died during one plague. How should we understand the use of the word "all" in the Bible?** Dr. Oswalt points out that biblical language, like any language, must be interpreted within its own context. The word "all" doesn't necessarily mean every single one, but it does mean that every *kind* of animal was affected in the whole country except Goshen. This highlights the importance of understanding the language of the time, and that the Bible does not come to us as timeless, placeless propositions but rather within a specific cultural context.
5. **What is the significance of the magicians' inability to replicate the plagues?** Initially, the magicians were able to duplicate some of the early plagues, but then they become unable to, and eventually suffer the effects of the plagues themselves. This demonstrates that while magical power may exist, it has its limits and is ultimately under the sovereignty of God. God is not just more powerful; He is the source of all power, and all power, even demonic power, is subject to His control. The plagues, like the miracles of Jesus, demonstrate that what the world considers life apart from God is actually death-dealing, and that God has the power to bring life from death.
6. **What is the significance of the "no statements" made by God in Exodus, and how do they relate to Pharaoh's initial denial of God?** The "no statements," like "there is none like me in all the earth," are declarations of God's unique nature and character. They emphasize that Yahweh is the self-existent, free, and uncontingent source of all being, as opposed to the limited and regional deities of the Egyptians. They show the progression from Pharaoh's initial statement "I do not know any Yahweh and I will not let Israel go" to his eventual recognition and confession. The goal is not simply to recognize God's *label* but to know *who* He is and His character.
7. **How does God's purpose for the plagues relate to both Pharaoh and to the wider world?** God reveals that he could have destroyed Egypt instantly but chose not to, so that his power and name could be proclaimed throughout the earth through the very events of the plagues. He is not merely seeking to punish Egypt but is also using the situation as an opportunity to be known universally. God's purposes will be accomplished whether it is through Pharaoh's cooperation or opposition. Ultimately it is the choice of the people to join with God in His purposes.

8. **How does Pharaoh's behavior illustrate the human struggle with pride and control, and what does it teach us about bargaining with God?** Pharaoh's refusal to submit stems from his pride and desire for control, which parallels the human desire to remain in charge of one's own life. He tries to bargain with God for his freedom instead of surrendering completely, which shows that this is a typical response to God's will. God accepts many of our initial responses out of grace, but the key to following him is surrendering our will and our control and accepting His. The story of Benedict Arnold and the example of “foxhole religion” highlights the dangers of making conditional promises and the importance of genuine surrender to God's will without dictating terms.