

### The Ten Plagues in Exodus

*<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.—Romans 1:20-23*

Today, we will be looking at the Ten Plagues in Exodus 6 through 11. As we have discussed before, the Israelites had been in Egypt for 400 years. Although they were blessed when they first entered the land of Egypt, after 400 year, they were now cursed as slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

If you will recall, the Lord made it so that Joseph would become overseer of Egypt for Pharaoh in order to protect His people from famine at the end of Genesis.

<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. <sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” <sup>41</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 41:39-41).

Joseph sets up his brothers and his father in the land of Goshen as shepherds. In Genesis 47:5-6 we see, the Pharaoh at the time giving the land to Joseph and his family.

Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. <sup>6</sup> The land of Egypt *is* before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know *any* competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock.”

Four hundred years later, the Israelites are now slaves under the new Pharaoh’s regime. The new Pharaoh did not know about Joseph or his brothers. All he saw was a large group of foreigners who were living in his country and the potential threat they could be to him and his kingdom since they would soon outnumber the Egyptians. So, he decides to deal shrewdly with them.

Exodus 1:13-14 tells us, “<sup>13</sup> So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. <sup>14</sup> And

they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.”

Now, the Lord has sent Moses to free His people from bondage, but after 400 years of living with the Egyptians, God had to prove to everyone, Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and the Israelites, that He was God and sovereign over all creation. In Exodus 6:5-9, we see the LORD’s plan to rescue the Israelites:

<sup>5</sup> And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. <sup>6</sup> Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I *am* the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. <sup>7</sup> I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup> And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you *as* a heritage: I *am* the Lord.’ ” <sup>9</sup> So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

However, the Israelites did not listen to Moses because they had been in bondage and suffered for so long that they could not believe that there was any hope.

Sometimes we are like the Israelites, we have been in bondage to the same sin for so long that we don’t believe that God can set us free. We fall back to our old ways because they are comfortable, or because we cannot let go of the pain. Just like He sent Moses to free His people from the bondage of slavery, He sent Jesus to free us from sin. We don’t have to live in bondage to sin because God sent his son Jesus to die for our sins so that we can have freedom from sin and live abundant lives for Him.

But God was about to fulfill his promise and send judgements to free His people from bondage. He sends Moses to Pharaoh over and over again to prove that He is God over ALL. He uses the plagues to show Pharaoh that He is in control of creation because He is the Creator of all things. Because Pharaoh thought of himself as a god, it would take time to convince him otherwise. His initial reaction to the Lord’s command shows his unbelief. In Exodus

5:2, “Pharaoh said, ‘Who *is* the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.’” So, the LORD sent the plagues to prove to Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews was truly the Lord of all creation.

The Egyptians had a polytheistic society in which they worshipped many gods. As Romans 1:20-23 tells us, they had looked at creation and had made idols of the Lord’s creation rather than worshipping the creator. “<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” So, the Lord used the plagues to not only send judgement but also to prove to the Egyptians that He was bigger and stronger than all their idols.

Because each of the Egyptian gods was supposedly in control of some part of creation, the Lord targeted the Egyptian gods with each of the plagues to show they were futile to protect the Egyptians.

The first Egyptian idol that the Lord targets is the Wadjet who was known as the cobra goddess who was supposed to protect the Pharaoh. Although the first encounter that Moses has with Pharaoh is not a plague, it is a direct attack on Pharaoh’s belief system. “<sup>10</sup> So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent” (Exodus 7:10). Although the magicians were also able to make their staffs into serpents, Aaron staff swallowed up their serpents proving to Pharaoh that their God was stronger than Pharaoh’s. Pharaoh should have understood the significance of the snake and heeded the warning, but he ignored it and hardened his heart.

In Exodus 7:14-25, the first plague turned the water of the Nile River into blood. This plague may have targeted the god of the Nile known as Hapi who was depicted as a water bearer in Egyptian culture. Hapi was thought to control the annual flooding and fertility of the Nile.

Several other Egyptian idols were also associated with the Nile river: Sobek, Khnum, Anuket, and Osiris. In Genesis, God separated the waters from the firmament and under the firmament on the second day of creation and separated the waters from land on the third day. By turning the Nile into blood, God showed everyone that He had control over the water and was LORD. The consequence to the Egyptians, the servants, and Pharaoh was that “The fish that were in the river died, the river stand, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exodus 7:21). Because the Nile was spread out through all of Egypt, it was known as the life blood of Egypt. Now, it was reeked of death and was loathsome to drink. Although Pharaoh was not moved, the Lord relented after seven days showing that God had more compassion for the people than Pharaoh did for his own people.

In Exodus 8:1-15, God sends the second plague in the form of abundant frogs. The frogs were everywhere: houses, beds, ovens, kneading bowls. They were on the Pharaoh, the Egyptians and the servants. This plague targeted the Egyptian idol Heqet who was known as the goddess of fertility and was depicted with a frog’s head. In Genesis 1, God created the creatures of the sea on the fifth day and directed them to multiply, “<sup>22</sup> And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’” This plague proved to everyone that God was in control of life and fertility. For the first time, Pharaoh is moved by a plague and begs the Lord to take away the frogs. So that it is clear that God is in control, the Lord asks for time frame to end the frogs and ends the plague the next day. The frogs died and were gathered and the land reeked of death once again. But Pharaoh hardened his heart and continued to resist the Lord.

In Exodus 8:16-19, God sends the third plague in the form of lice or some translations say gnats out of the dust. This plague may have targeted the Egyptian idol known as Geb, who was thought to control the dust of the earth, Set, and Hathor. In Genesis, the Lord separated the waters from dry land on the third day. Everyone is also affected by this plague, but for the first time, Pharaoh’s magicians are unable to replicate the plague. Although the magicians were completely convinced that “This is the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19), Pharaoh’s heart was still

hard and didn't heed them. But, the Egyptians were starting to see that Moses and Aaron's God was truly the God of all creation.

The first three plagues affected all of Egyptian society, including the Israelites. They mostly targeted their lifestyle and were more of an inconvenience. They served as a wake up call to the Israelites who were blinded by their fear of Pharaoh and his gods, the cruelty they experienced under Pharaoh, and their lack of knowledge about God and their covenant with Him. It was also a wake up call for those Egyptians who were willing to accept that their little gods were powerless against the Lord.

In Exodus 8:20-32, the fourth plague consists of swarms. Most translation add *of flies*, but it is not clear what type of swarm it is. Most likely it is swarms of various insects. Although some Jewish translations say animals, this isn't consistent with the swarm being on "the ground on which they stand" in verse 21. In Genesis 1, everything that creeps on the earth on the sixth day, "25 And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good."

For the first time during the plagues, the Lord makes a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. In verses 22-23, the Lord says, "And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms *of flies* shall be there, in order that you may know that I *am* the Lord in the midst of the land. 23 I will make a difference between My people and your people." It is interesting to note that the land of Goshen is the land that was given to the Israelites to dwell by the Pharaoh during Joseph's time in Genesis 47:5-6.

This plague may have targeted the Egyptian idol Khepri who was thought to control seasons and was depicted with the head of a fly. Other Egyptian idols associated with the sky were Nut and Shu. This plague became an infestation in all of the Egyptian homes and for the first time, Pharaoh gives in a little by saying that he would allow them to make sacrifices as long as they didn't go far. He even asks Moses to intercede for himself. However, once the plague is lifted, he hardens his heart again and did not let them go.

The fifth plague affects the livestock with disease in Exodus 9:1-7. All of the livestock are affected: horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. The word pestilence can be translated as

epidemic. This plague may have targeted the Egyptian idol Hathor who was the goddess of love and protection and was depicted with a cow's head. Apis was another god who was known as the god of fertility and was depicted as a bull. Once more, the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptian's livestock and Israelite's livestock. All of the Egyptian's livestock died and none of the Israelite's. Again, Pharaoh did not relent.

In Exodus 9:8-12, the Lord sends the sixth plague by turning ashes into fine dust that causes boils on man and beast. In Genesis 1, man and beast were created on the sixth day, and the Lord begins to prove He has control over both. This plague may have targeted Isis who was thought of as the goddess of medicine, Sekhmet or Sunu who influence diseases.

In Exodus 9:13-35, the Lord throws everything at Pharaoh. He sent this plague to the very heart of Pharaoh so that he would know, "that there is none like me in all the earth." (v. 14) He lets Pharaoh know that he didn't kill the Egyptians with the disease because he chose not to kill them. He tells Pharaoh the clear purpose for the plagues in verse 16, "But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Again, the Lord shows mercy to the Egyptians by warning them of plague that was about to come and giving them an opportunity to avoid it.

The seventh plague consisted of hail that would destroy everything it hit. It was thunder, hail, and fire that darted toward the ground. It destroyed anything it struck: the Egyptian's fields, trees, men, and animals. This plague overshadowed Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, the god of crops and fertility; and Set, the god of the desert storms. They were useless against the almighty God. Pharaoh seems to repent in verse 27 claiming that he sinned and tells Moses that he would let them go. Yet, once Moses stops the hail, Pharaoh hardens his heart and the hearts of his servants and refuses to let them go.

Before the eighth plague in Exodus 10:1-20, the Lord adds a stipulation for the purpose of the plagues. The Lord tells Moses in verse 2, "and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I *am* the Lord." If the Israelites had not forgotten their covenant with God, then they might not have stayed in Egypt for so long. However, they got

comfortable and forgot that the Lord had promised them land of Canaan. So, the Lord makes sure that the people will remember His covenant moving forward.

The Lord sends locusts to finish off anything that was left behind by the hail thus completely destroying the land of Egypt and the god of the air and unseen forces, Amun. Again, Pharaoh appears to repent in verse 16 by admitting his sin against God, but as soon as the Locusts were removed, he hardened his heart again.

The ninth plague in Exodus 10:21-29 is darkness. But this darkness is the kind that could be felt. There wasn't any light anywhere, not from the sky, or flames. This dwarfed Ra who was considered the sun god and one of the most powerful Egyptian gods. God created the light on the first day of creation and separated light from darkness in Genesis, so he could remove all light from the Egyptians. As a result, Pharaoh seems to give in, but still wants to keep the Israelite's flocks and herds since all of theirs were destroyed. However, when Moses declines, Pharaoh hardens his heart again and keeps the Israelites.

In Exodus 11:1-10 we see the final plague which is the death of all the firstborn of Egypt both mankind and animals. Even though Pharaoh considered himself a god, this final plague showed God's power over Pharaoh himself who was powerless to protect the people and his own child from death. Now, Moses had become very great in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and the Egyptians. The Lord made provision for the people to protect his people and to prepare them when they must leave in haste after the plague hits.

Through the ten plagues we can see the futility of man's worship of idols, the futility of any man, no matter how powerful, to stand against the will of God, and the Lord's protection over His people. It is also a reminder of the importance to learn and teach God's word to the next generations so that they don't get trapped by the idols of their generation.