

Exodus Chapters Seven to Eleven The Plagues Strike Egypt

Read 7:1-13

v. 1 – In the same way, God will make us “as God” to people we encounter. If they harden their hearts or reject the message we bring, we shouldn't take it personally; it is the Lord they are rejecting. Look up: 1 Thessalonians 4:8

v.3-5 - The Lord was going to bring righteous judgment upon Egypt: Pharaoh and the Egyptians said they didn't know who the Lord was (5:2); God is not only going to let them know who He is, but also give the Israelites an opportunity to see the might of the One who will sustain them.

v.11-13 - Notice how here, as well as in the first plague to come, the sorcerers powers only multiplied the action of God. They didn't correct the problem. Have no doubt Satan is powerful and capable imitating God's work. It is crucial that we always be mindful of the message and not just the miracle. Look up: 2 Thessalonians 2:9

Read 7:14-24

v.17 – “*By this you shall know that I am the Lord*” - God did not plague Egypt merely because Pharaoh would not let the children of Israel go; but because Pharaoh refused to recognize the almighty nature of God.

V 19-21 - This is the first of the plagues. The first nine are grouped together in threes. In this structure of threes, the first two plagues in each set come after a warning and a call to repentance; the third plague in each set comes without warning (gnats, boils, first-born).

Not only did the plagues bring punishment against Egypt, the plagues also answered Pharaoh's original question: “*Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?*” (Exodus 5:2). The Egyptian god *Hapi* who was a worshipped spirit of the Nile, was dealt a defeat, and proved unable to protect the territory from the Lord.

v.22-25 - If the magicians of Egypt really wanted to do a miracle, why didn't they turn the bloody river clean again? This reveals how Satan does not perform constructive, cleansing miracles. He brings supernatural destruction, but not goodness. All they did was multiple the problem and make more bloody water. Look up: John 10:10

They also were able to duplicate the plague of the frogs, apparently by increasing the frogs!

Read 8:16-19 - They were unable to reproduce the plague of the lice, and they did not show any further power

After the magicians' power ends, Pharaoh begins to soften while the plague is covering the land, but when it is withdrawn, he hardens his heart again.

Read 9:27-28, 10:3-12, 10:16-20 - Pharaoh said the words of repentance but did not follow through with actions. Look up: Ecclesiastes 5:4-5

This pattern will occur throughout the next eight plagues (see table, next page), before the final, tenth plague, the death of the firstborn and the commemoration of Passover, before the Exodus begins.

Four times Pharaoh attempts a compromise:

8:25 (within the land)

8:28 (not too far away)

10:8-11 (Israelite men only)

10:24 (only people, no flocks)

Read 9:13-21 - In this extended warning God lets Pharaoh know who is in control. As bad as it has been, it has only been by God's mercy that Pharaoh and Egypt have not been cut off from the earth. God tells Pharaoh through Moses (v.16) that his resistance is being used so that all the earth will proclaim God's glory. Look up: 1 Corinthians 10:9-12

Read 10:27-29 – The first eight verses of chapter 11 occur within this meeting.

The plagues occurred over time from the late summer to spring. Secular scholars have suggested that they were merely natural events, and in fact, some religious scholars have conceded that they may have been a miraculous intensification of natural events. For example, the Nile turning to blood has been explained as being caused by red sediment filling the Nile from heavy rains in late summer. The frogs which followed could be similarly explained. The hail happened in January or February, when it would be expected based on the Bible's explanation of the ripening of the grains. The Bible actually explains the natural phenomenon used to bring the locusts and to remove them, the spring east and west winds that usually brought them, but not in numbers so great.

The natural phenomenon explanation does not satisfy, however. For example, the Nile is described by Moses, who wrote Exodus, as turning to blood, not being filled with silt and sediment as happened yearly in late summer. He would surely have known the difference. The natural explanation, in fact, is addressed by Exodus 7:17, which emphasizes that all water is affected, including water in containers and reservoirs. But as Pharaoh hardened his heart after each plague was removed, he certainly would have mentally explained away what had happened in ways like this.

Regardless, as each one happened, with supernatural intensity and in God's timing, and as each one receded when Moses prayed to God, the Egyptian officials began to realize God's power. Many of them had a religious significance, in that they were a display of power over an Egyptian deity (the Nile, cattle, frogs, the sun god). Others placed a distinction between the Egyptians and God's people who were unaffected by the plague (hail, darkness). To those whose hearts were not hardened by pride, the plagues clearly showed God's judgment of Egypt and favor toward His people.

The last plague, however, the death of the firstborn, could not be dismissed as a natural phenomenon. It was then that Pharaoh allowed Israel to leave.

The Plagues

	Plague	Natural explanation	Effect	Pharaoh's reaction
7:14-24	Blood	Dismissed by some as merely red water, caused by heavy summer rains sending silt and sediments down the river	Fish die, the river smells, the people are without water	Pharaoh's magicians duplicate the miracle by "secret arts" and so Pharaoh is unconcerned
8:1-15	Frogs	Could have been caused by the same heavy rains increasing the frog population	Frogs come up from the water and completely cover the land	Again Pharaoh's magicians duplicate the miracle by sorcery. Pharaoh asked for relief, but then hardened his heart
8:16-19	Gnats	Gnats bred in the flooded fields of Egypt in late autumn	The dust of Egypt becomes a massive swarm of gnats	Magicians are unable to duplicate this; they say it is the "finger of God," but Pharaoh's heart remains hard
8:20-32	Flies	Probably the flies which grow in the banks of the receding Nile river	Swarms of flies cover the land; Israel is spared	Pharaoh negotiates, promises to let the Hebrews go, but then hardens his heart and refuses
9:1-7	Livestock	The flies of the fourth plague could have brought anthrax	All the Egyptian livestock dies – but none of Israel's is even sick	Pharaoh still refuses to let the people go
9:8-12	Boils	The anthrax that could have killed the livestock also causes boils	Horrible boils break out on all Egyptians	Magicians cannot respond because they are struck down with boils as well – Pharaoh refuses to listen
9:13-35	Hail	Hail was not unheard of in January and February, when flax and barley are in flower but wheat and spelt have not germinated (Ex. 9:31-32)	Hailstorms kill all the slaves and animals left out or unprotected and destroy almost every plant; no hail in Goshen	Pharaoh admits his sin, but then changes his mind once the hail stopped
10:1-20	Locusts	The Bible explains the locusts arrival and departure with the east and west winds of March and April, but they were in greater number	Locusts cover Egypt and eat everything left after the hail	Moses warned Pharaoh, and his officials urged him to let the Hebrews go. After plague, Pharaoh relents, then after relief, God hardens his heart.
10:21-29	Darkness	Blinding sandstorms cover Egypt in early spring; that does not explain why lights couldn't be lit inside dwellings	Total darkness covers Egypt for three days so no one can even move – except the Hebrews who have light in their dwellings as usual	Pharaoh promises to let Israel go, but again changes his mind
11:1- 12:33	Death of Firstborn	No natural explanation can be offered for this plague	The firstborn of all the people and cattle of Egypt die – but Israel is spared	Pharaoh and the Egyptians urge Israel to leave quickly; after they are gone, Pharaoh again changes his mind and gives chase