

Divine Plagues III

The Plagues of Egypt

By Rich Jacobs, MD

God has a purpose and reasons for His judgments through plagues; they are not divine “temper tantrums!” The “Plagues of Egypt” are no different.

*“When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and **bring out My hosts**, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt **by great judgments. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD**, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt **and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.**” So Moses and Aaron did it; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh. Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Work a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘**Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.**’” So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. **But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 7:4-13***

The Plagues of Egypt begin to establish God’s sovereignty and Lordship over Israel, the “world”, and the unseen spiritual realm.

1. God proves He is God to BOTH the Egyptians AND the Hebrews (**Exodus 6:6-8;7:5**).
 - a. Moses, God’s chosen leader, must be prepared to acknowledge God, obey Him, and to lead His people back to the Promised Land.
 - b. Pharaoh must learn of the true God, and acknowledge He is Lord. He must also acknowledge and obey God’s appointed leader, Moses. Pharaoh must obey God, even if unwillingly.
 - c. Israel must be re-introduced to the Lord after centuries in Egypt. They must learn to obey Him and His chosen leader for them, Moses. Their national identity must be formed so that they may enter their Promised Land as a nation. Remember that Israel entered Egypt as a family!.
 - d. The Egyptians must learn that the Lord is God. Paradoxically, this they do through Israel indirectly.
2. God show’s that He is more powerful than the Egyptian gods. This He does through many “judgments” (Hebrew: “*Shebetim*” - **Exodus 7:4**). Consider the staff-to serpent miracle in **Exodus 7**. Apep is the Egyptian deity of chaos, is represented by a giant serpent. Aaron’s serpent-staff overcomes the serpent-staffs of the Egyptians. There is a message here.
 - a. God symbolically proves that He is greater than Satan, the ultimate power behind Pharaoh and his kingdom.
 - b. Apep was god of darkness, ruler of the underworld. He was the enemy of the god of light, worshipped as Ra (the Sun god) by the Egyptians. The Hebrew word used for serpent in **Exodus 7**, was not “*nachash*”, the usual word for serpent or snake. Instead, it was “*tannin*”, which is also translated as “*dragon*” or “*sea monster*”. The Hebrew word “*tannin*” is also used to describe Leviathan, a great twisted serpent, or dragon, who represents Satan (**Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; Psalm 74:14; Psalm 89:9; Revelation 20:2**).
 - c. Apep's head was made of flint, a symbol of extremely stubborn pride. Leviathan, a great serpent who symbolizes Satan, is also characterized by extremely stubborn pride (**Job 41:34**). God also says Israel’s head and heart are as hard as “flint” (**Ezekiel 3:9**;

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Zechariah 7:12). Apparently, the Hebrews also require God's miraculous intervention to believe and obey Him!

3. Other noteworthy points about **Exodus 7**
 - a. God calls Israel "*My hosts*", which is translated from the Hebrew word, "*tsaba*", which means "*army*". The Lord views Israel as combatants in His fight against His enemies. He is releasing them as prisoners of war!
 - b. The Plagues that will follow are also God's "judgments" (from the Hebrew word, "*shephet*"). God is acting to bring justice and restore righteousness. Both the Egyptians and the spirits that motivate them have acted in such a way so as to justify God's intervention. They deserve the plagues that will come upon them!
 - c. The long time of Israel's oppression by the Egyptians was also the long time of God's grace for them to repent. This they did not do, so God is multiplying their punishment by hardening Pharaoh's heart to delay their surrender.

*Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say." But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." Then the **anger of the LORD burned against Moses**, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart . . . Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the **LORD met him and sought to put him to death**. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." **So He let him alone**. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood" — because of the circumcision. **Exodus 4:12-14; 24-26***

1. God showed Moses miracles and promised to teach his mouth exactly what to say to the Jews and to Pharaoh, but Moses was still reluctant to obey the Lord. Instead, in essence, Moses told God to send someone else. This lack of faith and fear of the Lord caused God to be angry, though the Lord did not punish Moses. Instead, Aaron was allowed to go with Moses to Egypt.
 2. Moses finally begins his journey to Egypt with his family. The Lord met with Moses along the way to Egypt. Reading between the lines, God must have asked Moses to enter into His covenant with Abraham and to circumcise his son as a sign of the covenant. It appears as though Moses balked at God's request. As a result, an already angry God appears to inflict a serious illness on Moses, seeking to put him to death.
 3. Moses tells his wife, Zipporah, to circumcise their son, which she reluctantly does in anger. As a result of this, God relents from seeking the death of Moses and "let him alone".
- **Moses had to be taught to fear God and to obey Him. His faith was tested when he was commanded to enter into Abraham's covenant with God. God was shaping Moses' identity to become a Jew so that He could use Him to shape the identity of the Hebrews into the nation of Israel.**
 - **Obedience qualified Moses to be used of God. Disobedience would have disqualified him and rendered him useless to the plans of God.**
 - **Moses first had to set an example for Israel. He could not ask them to enter into the Abrahamic covenant if he did not do so. God's man must lead by example.**

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And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘**Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.**’” But Pharaoh said, “**Who is the LORD** that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go.” Then they said, “**The God of the Hebrews** has met with us. Please, let us go a **three days’ journey** into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, **otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.**” **Exodus 5:1-3**

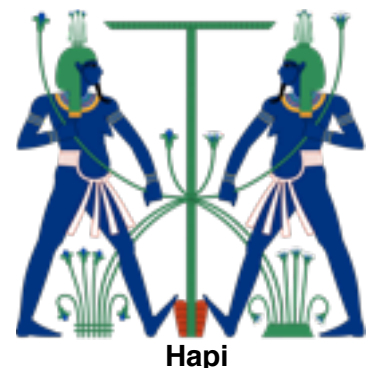
1. Notice that Moses’ first asked Pharaoh for a temporary separation from Egypt for a limited purpose. This was to be a only three day journey into the wilderness and a single celebration of a feast. A permanent resettlement to another land does not seem to be part of this discussion between Moses and Pharaoh.
 2. Pharaoh does not know which “god” is requiring this trip by the Hebrews. When he is told the God of the Hebrews was commanding this, Pharaoh does not recognize or respect this “god’s” authority or command.
 3. Moses is concerned that a failure to obey the Lord would result in God’s judgment on “us”, implying that both Egyptians and Hebrews would experience pestilence or sword for disobedience. Perhaps Moses learned his lesson from the “circumcision experience”.
- **God is using this confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh to separate the Jews from the Egyptians. The Jews were no longer to be exploited Egyptians. They no longer belonged to Pharaoh, and by implication, no longer behold to Egyptian gods.**
 - **Israel had been in Egypt for hundreds of years. The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, begins to shape a separate Jewish national identity. The Plagues that follow solidify that identity for the Jews and in the minds of the Egyptians. Recall that the Jews entered Egypt as a family, not a nation.**

The Plagues - God v. the “gods”

1. The Nile River Becomes Blood and Death

Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and **it will be turned to blood. The fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul, and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.**” **Exodus 7:17,18**

- This plague confronts of the Egyptian god, Hapi, the twin god of the upper and lower Nile River. This god controlled the annual flooding of the Nile, which enriched the Egyptian soil and economy. Hapi was sometimes called the “Lord of the fishes” by the Egyptians. Hapi was usually depicted as an intersex person with a pregnant abdomen, pendulous breasts, and a beard. It represents a fertility motif.
- The plague also appeared to affect the land of Goshen, where the Hebrews mainly resided.
- The Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate features of this plague, thus causing a hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Moses’ staff is used to initiate the plague.



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2. Frogs

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.

Exodus 8:5, 6

- This plague may represent a divine repudiation of the Egyptian god Heqet. This god was represented by a frog and was a symbol of fertility, since millions of frogs normally arise in Egypt following its annual flooding.
- This plague caused frogs to be everywhere - in the beds, ovens, kneading bowls.
- The magicians were able to make frogs appear too.
- The land of Goshen appears to have been afflicted with this plague.
- When the plague was lifted, the frogs had to be collected in stinking piles.



Heqet

3. Gnats

They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and **struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast.** All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. **Exodus 8:17**

- This plague may humiliate the Egyptian god, Geb, who was the god of earth. The lice were made from the dust of the earth, but when turned into gnats, the earth became a curse, not a blessing. Geb was powerless to prevent this. YHWH is the only God!
- This is the last time Aaron's staff was used to produce a plague.
- The magicians could not duplicate this miracle and exclaimed, "This is the finger of God!"
- Goshen appears to be affected by the plague.



Geb

4. "Swarms"

Then the LORD did so. And there came **great swarms of flies** into the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and **the land was laid waste** because of the swarms of flies in all the land of Egypt. **Exodus 8:24**

- Although the Hebrew is often translated into English as "flies", the original language may be translated more specifically as "swarms" (Hebrew: "arob"). Since "swarms" usually refers to insects, translators have guessed these are swarms of flies. The Septuagint, however, translates "swarms" as "the dog fly" or "botfly" (Greek: "kunomuia") - scientific name: *Dermatobia hominid*. The botfly prefers hot, moist conditions, such as would be caused by the Nile River. This insect can burrow into unbroken skin to lay its eggs and produce painful sores. Cattle do not mount an effective immune response to this infection and may die from it. This may explain the next plague.
- If "swarms" refers to a botfly infestation, this plague could repudiate Sobek, a Nile River god that is also associated with pharaonic power, military prowess, and fertility. Sobek was charged with protecting the people from the dangers of the Nile River. He was often shown as a human with a crocodile head.
- God spares the Hebrews in Goshen from this plague, demonstrating that He is



Sobek

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able to protect them from both the plague itself and from Pharaoh's power.

- This plague causes Pharaoh to plead with Moses for relief. Pharaoh even agrees to let the Hebrews go to worship in the desert, but he reneges on his promise when the plague is lifted.

5. Death of livestock

So the LORD did this thing on the next day, and ***all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died.*** **Exodus 9:6**

- This plague repudiates several Egyptian gods, chief among them being Hathor. Hathor was depicted as a cow deity that suckled the Pharaoh. Hathor also was ambiguously pictured as woman wearing a large set of horns on her head. She was called the "cow goddess" and she represented fertility and childbirth.
- This plague did not just affect cattle, but it also killed horses, donkeys, and camels.
- God's grace was shown as Pharaoh was warned about the plague a day in advance, giving Pharaoh a chance to think about his disobedience and reconsider his decision.
- The plague was said to affect the Egyptian livestock that are in the field (Hebrew: "bsadeh"), **Exodus 9:3**. Is it possible that livestock left inside a barn or shelter was spared this plague?
- The Hebrews were not affected by this plague. When Pharaoh visited Goshen and verified this, it hardened his heart.



6. Boils

So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became ***boils breaking out with sores on man and beast.*** **Exodus 9:30**

- Some theologians believe this illness confronted Isis, the Egyptian goddess associated with health, medicine, and peace. The plague resulted in a grievous illness that even afflicted Pharaoh's magicians. In fact, the magicians could not even stand before Moses because of their boils.
- It is tempting to speculate that the boils were from the botfly swarms. Botfly infestations can be lethal to livestock.
- This plague was invoked without prior announcement. The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to bring the boils on the Egyptians without any prior confrontation with Pharaoh.
- The Hebrews were not afflicted with this terrible plague.
- The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, resulting in the next plague.



7. Hail

Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and ***hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail.*** **Exodus 9:23-26**

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- This plague addresses the Egyptian goddess of the sky, Nut. Nut was one of the oldest god in the Egyptian pantheon. Her story is associated with the creation story believed by the Egyptians.
- God provide advanced notice of the plague to the Egyptians. People who believe the Lord and removed their servants and beasts from the fields suffered no losses.
- Strangely, the huge hail created fire when it struck the ground. Whatever was not crushed by the hail was in danger of being burned by the fire it caused.
- The hail destroyed mainly the barley and flax crops. The wheat crop was largely spared.



Nut (on top)

8. Locusts

*So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, **the east wind brought the locusts**. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; they were very numerous. There had never been so many locusts, nor would there be so many again. For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt. Exodus 10:13-15*

- The plague of locusts is thought to be a divine confrontation with the Egyptian goddess, Set, which is associated with crops. Other gods and goddesses could also be humiliated by this plague.
- Before this plague, the Lord told Moses the history of these plagues and God's judgment of the Egyptians would become an intergenerational story of Israel that would recall God's sovereign power and deliverance for them
- When the plague of locusts came, they consumed the crops that were spared by the Hail Plague; there would be no harvest in Egypt that year!
- The prevailing winds in Egypt come generally from the North. The Lord directed an easterly wind the preceded the Locust Plague for about a day. This wind brought to Egypt a swarm of locusts the probably bred in the Arabian desert.
- When Pharaoh saw Egypt was being destroyed by the plague, he told Moses that he had sinned against them and against God. (**Exodus 10:16**). Pharaoh gave Moses permission to bring Israel out of Egypt, but when the plague was lift, Pharaoh reneged.



Set

9. Darkness

*So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was **thick darkness** in all the land of Egypt for **three days**. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, abut all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. Exodus 10:22, 23*

- The plague of darkness proved the powerlessness of the Egyptian god, Ra, often associated with the Sun
- This plague also proved God's power over Pharaoh because the Egyptians believed the Pharaoh was the earthly embodiment of Ra



Ra

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- The darkness lasted for 3 days and was so profound that people were unable to see one another
- The darkness was not just an absence of sunlight or moonlight as it was present in peoples' homes. The homes of the Jews were spared from this terrible darkness.
- Pharaoh agrees to let the Jews go, but he refuses to allow them to bring their livestock with them. Moses rejects this compromise.

10. Death of firstborn males

*Moses said, "Thus says the LORD, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the **firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die**, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. **Exodus 11:4***

- Some expositors say this plague humbles Isis, whom the Egyptians regarded as the protector of children
- With this plague, God tells Moses that not only will Pharaoh let the Jews leave Egypt, but he actually will drive them from the country. He also tells Moses that the Hebrews will be given favor with the Egyptians so that they will gladly give them silver, gold, and other precious possessions.
- God initiated the Hebrew calendar with this last plague. This month was to be the first month in their calendar. For this reason, we know the Firstborn Death Plague occurred in Nisan.
- The blood of an unblemished lamb painted on the doorway of a home allowed the "Death Angel" to pass over that house and spare the firstborn. This event is celebrated by Israel as Passover. The Lord provided specific instructions to Israel about how to celebrate the Passover Feast. The Passover Lamb foreshadows Jesus!
- The last plague freed Israel from 430 years in Egypt, rescuing them in the 4th generation (**Genesis 15:16**)

IN SUMMARY

The Plagues of Egypt were NOT divine showmanship. They were necessary for several reasons. For example, consider the following.

- **The Plagues of Egypt punished Pharaoh and the Egyptians for wickedly oppressing and exploiting the Hebrews — people who were their neighbors and fellow countrymen for centuries!**
- **The Plagues of Egypt proved that YHWH is God to both Jews and Egyptians; the Egyptian gods were powerless before the Lord. Egypt was given a chance to reject their idols — which they rejected.**
- **The Plagues of Egypt fulfilled prophecy spoken by God to Abraham centuries earlier as the Jews left Egypt and returned to their Promised Land in the 4th generation, thus proving God's Word!**
- **The Plagues of Egypt made a separation between God's people and others, forming a national identity in Israel, allowing God to disentangle them from the Egyptians, among whom they lived for generations.**
- **The Plagues of Egypt proved God's sovereign power to the unbelieving and rebellious spirit realm that inhabited the idols of Egypt. Ultimately, God humiliated Satan himself, who rules the demon world.**

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- The Plagues of Egypt established a foundation for the Law that would come later, and re-established the Abrahamic Covenant in Israel. They also paved the way for Christ by foreshadowing the Passover Lamb.
- The Plagues of Egypt created an indelible memory in the Israel's history that has survived for millennia. This memory, together with similar end-times oppression and Trumpet and Bowl Plagues, will jog Israel's collective memory, helping them find Jesus at long last. And thus, all Israel will be saved (Romans 11).

Final Note: Liberal theologians and unbelieving archeologists assert that the entire Exodus story is merely a fable. They deny Israel ever inhabited Egypt. They rightly state that there is no historical or archeological evidence of the Exodus events of the Bible, which they state and to transpire during the reign of Rameses II, about 1290 B.C. The Bible critics place the Exodus during the reign of Rameses II because **Exodus 12:37**, mentions the city of Rameses, named after the Pharaoh. They conclude Rameses, therefore, had to be ruling at that time. But, these skeptics fail to consider all the Biblical evidence. Firstly, **Genesis 47:11**, also mentions the "land of Rameses" as the place where Joseph and his family settled in Egypt — but that settlement took place hundreds of years before the Exodus — long before Pharaoh Ramses lived or reigned. There is no way they could assert that Ramses reigned during the times of Joseph and Moses. Skeptics fail to consider that Moses, and those who helped him complete **Exodus** and **Genesis**, evidently were writing from a perspective that was contemporary with the later Pharaoh, Rameses. They were describing earlier events using contemporaneous names and places. The Bible skeptics also ignore **1 Kings 6:1**, which says that the Exodus took place 480 years before Solomon completed the Temple, which implies a date of about 1446 B.C. — hundreds of years BEFORE the reign of Pharaoh Rameses. No wonder there is no evidence of the Exodus during his reign! Is there any historical and archeological evidence for the Exodus in about 1446 BC. Yes! Archeologists now are excavating Avaris at Tell el-Dahb, in Goshen, a huge ancient city underneath the ruins of the Egyptian city of Rameses, right where Exodus says it should be. This city first arose during the reign of the Hyksos Pharaohs and began with a small settlement of only about 100 people. The Hyksos were a semitic people, related to the Jews, who conquered Egypt in about the time Joseph became Vizier under Pharaoh. They would have been more favorably disposed to befriending Joseph and helping Israel than the non-semitic Pharaohs that replaced them later. Israel entered Egypt during famine with 70 family members (**Exodus 1:5**) - about the size of Early Avaris. The archeology shows the ancient citizens of Avaris were also semites from Canaan, just like the Jews. And a large palace with twelve tombs were found in the center of Avaris. One grand tomb had a statue with a ruler wearing a multicolored coat, just like Joseph! The city grew to over 25,000 people over the next several centuries, when it was suddenly abandoned! The date of the abandonment of the city approximates 1450 BC, a time when a non-semitic Pharaoh (one who did not know Joseph) had arisen. There is archeological evidence that the semites living in this city were impressed into slavery during the generation prior the city's abandonment; the skeletal remains show evidence of their hard labor and malnutrition. The ruins show they left the city suddenly, as though in a hurry. This is compelling evidence for Israel in Egypt, their enslavement, and their Exodus. If this is true, the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Thutmose II. His brief reign began in prosperity, but ended in ruin, with no son to follow him, because that son was struck down by the final Plague. Finally, there is an ancient Egyptian papyrus called the "Admonitions of Ipuwer", written by an Egyptian scribe, that also describes plagues in Egypt that are consistent with Exodus. The Mishna says these plagues lasts for about a year - from Iyyar to Nissan!