

### ***VIII. Let the Plagues Begin!***

23-Jul-06 Exodus 7:8-25

*Theme:* The ten plagues: 1) reveal the knowledge of God; 2) demonstrate God's power and glory; 3) bring judgment upon the sins of Egypt; 4) give Egypt an opportunity to repent; 5) show God's victory over the Egyptian gods; and 6) force Israel to leave Egypt.

*Key Verses:* Exodus 7:16-18 <sup>16</sup>And you shall say to him, 'The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness"; but indeed, until now you would not hear! <sup>17</sup>Thus says the LORD: "By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. <sup>18</sup>And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river.'"

#### Review

Last week we looked at "Prelude to a Mess" – three short sections of Scripture that all served to prepare us for the coming of the plagues (which we will begin studying this morning). In 5:22-6:13, God answered Moses' prayer and gave him encouragement. God had not only made promises to the patriarchs in the past and heard the current groanings of His people, but He also planned future acts of salvation. God promised to redeem Israel from bondage, to adopt them into His covenant family, and to give them an inheritance. The seven "I wills" of salvation are guaranteed – not because of Moses and his inability – but because the name of the LORD ensures its.

The genealogy of 6:14-27 reinforces the lineage of the human leadership of the exodus – Moses and Aaron. However, the *inclusio* before and after the genealogy emphasizes the inability of Moses and Aaron to accomplish the salvation that God has planned. Thus, God continues to reassure Moses that despite Moses' uncircumcised lips and Pharaoh's hard heart, it is the strong hand of God that will prevail. Once again, God's ability is greater than man's inability. Salvation, from beginning to end, is of the LORD. This is the great truth of the Old Testament, and it is the great truth of the New Testament. Our great salvation is accomplished solely and completely through Jesus Christ, "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

#### Introduction

<sup>19</sup>But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand.

<sup>20</sup>So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go (Exodus 3:19-20).

Way back at the burning bush, God had told Moses He would "strike Egypt with all My wonders." Today, we begin our study of God's "wonders." We will spend a total of three weeks studying the ten plagues. This morning, we will spend some time introducing the plagues and looking at them as a whole. Then, we will look at the prologue to the plagues – rods changing into serpents – before we cover the first plague. Over the next two weeks we will look at the details of the rest of the plagues. So, without further adieu, let the plagues begin!

## Exodus I – Notes

### A. Introducing the Plagues

#### 1. *The Ten Plagues*

The account of the ten plagues is described in chapters 7 through 11 of Exodus. Several different terms are used to describe these acts of God. We call them “plagues,” and the Bible uses a Hebrew word that is translated as “plague” several times (9:14; 11:1; 12:13). The Bible also calls these acts of “judgment” (6:6; 7:4; 12:12) and “signs” (7:3; 8:23; 10:2). But the Biblical word most often associated with the intervention of God into the natural creation is “wonder” (3:20; 4:21; 7:3; 11:9; 11:10). The ten plagues of Egypt are more than just the natural devastation of a great kingdom; they are the “wonders of God.”

Of interest is the number of plagues that God visits upon Egypt: ten. In some sense, these ten plagues correspond to the Ten Commandments God later gives to Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20). The correspondence isn’t in content, but in numeric symbolism. Numbers in the Bible are often symbolic. For instance, the number seven often connotes spiritual or moral completion or perfection. This meaning is derived from Creation, when the world is morally perfect (“very good”) as God rests on the Sabbath or seventh day.

Just as the number seven often symbolizes fullness of quality, the number ten is often used to picture fullness of quantity. The Ten Commandments are a full and complete expression of God’s moral law. And the ten plagues are a full and complete expression of God’s justice and judgment.

It takes some time for the full expression of God’s justice and judgment to unfold through the ten plagues. The last plague – the death of the firstborn – takes place at the Passover, which occurs at the spring new moon in March or April. From the description of the crops destroyed in the hailstorm (9:31-32), we can estimate that the seventh plague took place in January. While it is not certain, the first plague against the Nile River might have taken place during its period of flooding, when the supposed power of the Nile god would be the greatest. Since the Nile typically flooded between June and September, the period of the plagues was likely six to nine months.

#### 2. *Purpose of the Ten Plagues*

Why does God devastate Egypt with His wonders? Why doesn’t he just “cut to the chase” and deliver Israel from slavery? There are many possible answers to the question of “why”. Let me give you six. First, the ten plagues *reveal the knowledge of God*. Pharaoh had claimed that he did not know the LORD (5:2). This was a true statement. Pharaoh likely had little knowledge of the God of the Hebrews. He did not have any experiential knowledge of who the LORD was or what He was capable of doing. Thus, the wonders of God were designed at one level to make Pharaoh and all of Egypt understand exactly who Yahweh is.

<sup>5</sup>And *the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD*, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them... <sup>17</sup>Thus says the LORD: “*By this you shall know that I am the LORD*. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood” (Exodus 7:5, 17; emphasis added).

The purpose of the very first plague – turning the Nile River to blood – and in fact all of the plagues was so that Pharaoh and the Egyptians would know that the God of Israel was the

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LORD. The first time Moses came to court, Pharaoh could rightly claim that he did not know the LORD. However, by the end of the tenth plague, he knew the LORD all too well.

This knowledge of the LORD was not limited only to Egypt. The plagues were also designed to teach Israel about their God:

<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 (Exodus 6:7; emphasis added).

Thus, we can see in the first place that the plagues had a missionary emphasis. They proclaimed to both Egypt and Israel alike who the LORD was and what He did. To the Egyptians, God acted as an avenger of justice, repaying their sin with punishment and death. To the Israelites, God was the angel of life, protecting them from judgment and delivering them from slavery. But in both cases, the knowledge of God's attributes and acts was revealed.

Secondly, the ten plagues *demonstrate God's power and glory*. God's wonders display His control over the natural creation and magnify His glory on earth. Pharaoh thought that he had the strong hand and the mighty arm (*cp.* 3:19). But Pharaoh was only a puppet in the hand of God. The LORD would take Pharaoh's strength and turn it against himself. God was going to take Pharaoh's strong hand and use it to drive out Israel from Egypt (6:1). It was the strength and power of God that was on display during the plagues, not the might of Pharaoh:

<sup>4</sup>But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments (Exodus 7:4).

In fact, God raised Pharaoh up for the very purpose of humiliating him, in order to display the power and glory of the LORD throughout the earth:

<sup>16</sup>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 (Exodus 9:16).

Thus, the ten plagues didn't just preach the knowledge of God to Egypt and Israel; God's name was glorified throughout the earth. The fame and glory of God's name did spread outside of Egypt. In particular, the wonder of the Red Sea crossing was well known to Rahab and the other Canaanite inhabitants of Jericho, forty years after the event occurred (Jos. 2:10). The knowledge of God's power and glory was declared in all the earth through His mighty wonders.

Thirdly, the ten plagues *bring judgment upon the sins of Egypt*. God brought Israel out of Egypt by "great judgments" (6:6; 7:4). The ten plagues are a demonstration of God's righteous judgment against sin. Pharaoh had raised his fist in open defiance of God, refusing to allow Israel to leave. The Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites and made them suffer cruel bondage for many, many years. In addition, they were guilty of infanticide and attempted genocide. The blood of many Israelites was on their hands. They had no defense; they were guilty. Thus, the plagues are an expression of God's righteous wrath that falls upon sinners.

In the fourth place, the ten plagues *give Egypt an opportunity to repent*. Although they are righteous judgments against sin, the ten plagues also demonstrate the grace of God. The severity of the plagues increases over time, giving Pharaoh and the Egyptians multiple opportunities to repent. Bloody water is nothing compared to death of the firstborn. God could have delivered the *coup de grâce* all in one blow – it would have been just and righteous. However, God brings

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judgment upon Egypt slowly, to give them a chance to confess their sin and turn to God for salvation. Motyer likens the early plagues to “warning shots across the bows of the Egyptian ship.” As in the case of Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah (*cp.* Jon. 3:10), if Egypt had repented they could have averted all the death and destruction that followed. The Bible indicates that some Egyptians did repent, for a “mixed multitude” went up from Egypt with the Israelites in the exodus (12:38). However, the vast majority remained in their sin, and so they “went down with the ship.” Most of the time we focus on the righteous and just character of God’s judgment in the plagues, but we must never forget the mercy and grace that God also shows to His enemies by giving them opportunities to repent before it is too late.

Fifth, the ten plagues *show God’s victory over the Egyptian gods*. The struggle in these chapters is not primarily a physical one between Moses and Pharaoh; it is a spiritual battle between the LORD and the forces of darkness in Egypt. Virtually all of the plagues are aimed at defeating one or more of the pantheon of Egyptian gods. The two most important – the Nile god and the sun god Ra – are defeated in the first plague (water to blood) and the ninth plague (utter darkness). God’s power over nature is complete and His victory over the pagan idols of Egypt is total. The Egyptian gods and Pharaoh are humiliated because they are shown to be powerless and useless.

Finally, the ten plagues *force Israel to leave Egypt*. This may seem obvious, since it was the whole point of God’s wonders. But don’t forget, Israel was enslaved by Egypt. They were in deep bondage. You can take Israel out of Egypt, but it is a lot harder taking “the Egypt” out of Israel. Although they cried out to God in distress before the exodus, at the first sign of hardship after the exodus Israel rebelled against Moses and against God. In the wilderness Israel reminisced about the “good ole days” when they ate melons and cucumbers, leeks, onions, and garlic in Egypt instead of that dratted manna (Num. 11:5). As their faith withered in the wilderness, they preferred to die with full stomachs and slaked thirst in Egypt rather than trust God for His provision (16:2; 17:3). If Egypt had not been destroyed, if the provision of Egypt hadn’t been wiped out by God, if Pharaoh hadn’t driven Israel out in despair, I doubt Israel would have left. That’s the power and attraction of sin. Although it is miserable, it still deceives you into believing it is worth it. Thus God’s wonders serve to liberate His people and free them from the kingdom of sin, because they did not have the power to leave in and of themselves.

### 3. *Organization of the Ten Plagues*

	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III	Final Plague
i.	1. Blood (7:14-28)	4. Flies (8:20-32)	7. Hail (9:13-35)	
ii.	2. Frogs (8:1-15)	5. Livestock (9:1-7)	8. Locusts (10:1-20)	10. Firstborn (11:1-10)
iii.	3. Gnats (8:16-19)	6. Boils (9:8-12)	9. Darkness (10:21-29)	

The sequence of the ten plagues is highly organized. The first nine are arranged in three cycles of three plagues each, while the tenth plague stands alone. Within each cycle (I, II, III) there are common features, and across each cycle (i, ii, iii) there are also similarities. The layout of these plagues is not random; they were designed and implemented by God.

The first plague of each cycle (blood, flies, hail) is announced by Moses to Pharaoh “early in the morning” (7:15; 8:20; 9:13). The second plague of each cycle (frogs, livestock, locusts) is

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announced by Moses to Pharaoh, presumably in the king's palace (8:1; 9:1; 10:1). The final plague of each cycle (gnats, boils, darkness) comes unannounced (8:16; 9:8; 10:21). It seems that at the end of each cycle, Pharaoh has forfeited his warning due to the stubbornness and hardness of his heart.

There are other features that are common throughout the plague narrative. At the end of every plague we have a commentary about the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. His heart is described in one of three ways: as hardened, as hardened by Pharaoh, or as hardened by God. In the early plagues God is not said to harden Pharaoh's heart. But in the later plagues (6, 8, 9, 10), God is hardening Pharaoh's already hard heart. Pharaoh had given himself over to rebellion against God long before God finishes the job.

The other main feature of most plagues is that there is some type of bargaining or capitulation with Moses by Pharaoh after most plagues (2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Of course, each time Moses grants Pharaoh's request to end a specific plague, Pharaoh reneges on his promise and his heart grows harder.

There are interesting features within and between each plague cycle. For example, there is an increasing severity from one cycle to the next. Although uncomfortable, the water turned to blood, frogs, and gnats were not destructive. These plagues affected everyone in the land, both Egyptian and Israelite. However, after the first cycle of plagues, God makes a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. The rest of the plagues do not affect the land of Goshen where Israel lived.

The second cycle was one of increased severity. In this cycle, the flies, livestock disease, and boils began to cause physical and economic harm. God begins to attack both the property and the people of Egypt. However, although the boils were uncomfortable, they still were not lethal.

The third cycle was the most severe. This time, the hail, locusts, and darkness devastate the Egyptian economy and society. Their crops were ruined and their faith in the sun god Ra (and his god-son Pharaoh) were destroyed. All three of these plagues come from above as if the hand of God were directly pouring woe upon Egypt. By the end of the ninth plague, virtually nothing was left of the Egyptian economy or society. And it took the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn in every household in Egypt, to strike the final blow of tragedy upon the nation of Egypt.

The first three plagues are initiated by the rod of Aaron. Aaron is the spokesman of the spokesman of God, and so his distance from God is paralleled in the relative mildness of the plagues he inaugurates. In the second set of three plagues, Moses speaks to Pharaoh, but there is no mention of a rod. Moses is speaking now instead of Aaron, so Pharaoh has been drawn a bit closer to God. The second round of plagues is more severe than the first, as the number of intermediaries between God and Pharaoh has decreased. Finally, each of third round of plagues is initiated by the hand of Moses holding the rod of God (*cp.* 4:20). These are the most severe plagues and they come directly from God Himself. There is no longer any intermediary between God and Pharaoh. It is as if the hand of God were striking Egypt directly with the forces of nature. The last plague is delivered by the hand of the LORD striking the firstborn of all Egypt. God is no longer using the forces of creation; He is acting directly to deliver judgment.

In the first cycle, the magicians of the Egyptian court combat Moses. They are able to duplicate the first two plagues of the water turned to blood and the multiplication of frogs, but they are

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unable to replicate the third plague of gnats. Thus the magicians are defeated at the end of the first cycle and acknowledge that “this is the finger of God” (8:19). At the end of the second cycle, the magicians are covered in boils “and could not stand before Moses” (9:11). Thus the court magicians are driven out and we no longer hear from them again in Exodus. Finally, at the end of third cycle of plagues, Pharaoh loses his temper and drives Moses out of his presence (10:28). This is a big mistake, because Pharaoh has just lost his last opportunity to repent before the tenth and devastating last plague.

Thus, we can see by the many ways in which the account of the ten plagues is presented, that they are not randomly organized but directed by the will of God.

### **B. Prologue: Snakes (7:8-13)**

Having considered these preliminary thoughts regarding the ten plagues as a whole, let us now turn our attention to the individual plagues. But before we do, we need to deal with the prologue to the ten plagues, found in Exodus 7:8-13. Just as the Ten Commandments have a prologue (Ex. 20:1-2), so the ten plagues have a prologue. In this case, it is the competition between the power of Moses and Aaron’s God versus the powers of the magicians of Egypt. This simple confrontation of rods turned into snakes is a microcosm of the entire spiritual battle that follows. As Ryken points out, “it introduces nearly all the main themes of the next five chapters of Exodus: the obedience of Moses and Aaron; the counterfeit miracles of Satan and his servants; the superior power of God and His rod; and the perpetual hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.”

#### **1. Aaron’s Rod (7:8-10)**

In verse 10, Aaron and Moses obeyed God completely, “just as the LORD commanded.” Although a minor point, this represents a major spiritual victory. At last Moses was submitting to God’s will instead of fighting against it. The brothers go in to Pharaoh, who asks them to do a “miracle” to demonstrate their power and authority. Unbelievers often ask for a sign (*cp.* Mt. 12:38), but even after they see the sign, their hearts remain hard and unconverted. Thus it is with Pharaoh.

Moses and Aaron are ready for this request, and so Aaron throws down his rod and it changes into a large serpent. The Hebrew word in this passage is *tannin*, which differs from the normal word for serpent, *nakash* (Ex. 4:2, 3). *Tannin* can mean any large reptile, even a crocodile. However, in 7:15, the word used again is *nakash*, so probably a large snake such as a cobra is intended.

This prologue to the ten plagues highlights the spiritual warfare of the struggle. The king of Egypt wore a ceremonial headdress with a cobra on it as “the emblem of Pharaoh’s power. It symbolized his divinity and majesty. When Aaron flings down the rod-snake before Pharaoh, he is therefore directly assaulting that token of Pharaoh’s sovereignty” (Currid). The question at hand is this: who has more power, the God of Israel or the gods of Egypt?

#### **2. Magicians’ Rods (7:11-12a)**

Pharaoh immediately calls for his court magicians to replicate the feat of Aaron. They are up to the task and turn their rods into *tannins* as well. Although some conservative commentators believe that God has the power to transform a rod into a snake and do all the other miracles of the ten plagues, they are hesitant to ascribe any of that same power to the court magicians of Egypt. For example, Mackay believes that the “rods” of the magicians were actually paralyzed

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cobras, put into a rigid state by applying pressure in a secret spot on their backs. When the magicians threw down these rod-like snakes, the hypnosis was broken and they appeared to be transformed from staffs into serpents.

But we must take the Bible at its word when it says the court magicians also had the power to transform rods into snakes. Where did that power come from? From the father of lies – Satan. Make no mistake; this was a spiritual battle, and Satan was supplying the power for the Egyptian side. But the power of the devil is no match for the power of the LORD. That is made clear when Aaron’s snake swallows the snakes of the magicians. At best, Satan is a cheap counterfeit, his power a pale knock-off on God’s power (*cp.* 2 Th. 2:9). He does not have the ability to create, only to imitate. This is more clearly seen in the first two plagues, where the court magicians have the ability to reproduce on a small, limited scale the water turned into blood and the multiplication of frogs. However, if they had true innovative power, they would have reversed the plagues of God to alleviate their suffering. But they could only imitate God’s work, thus demonstrating they had no inherent creative power of their own. Enns puts it this way: “counterfeit power, although real power, is not lasting power.”

### **3. Swallowing Rods (7:12b-13)**

The fading power of the magicians is seen when the serpent-rod of Aaron swallows up the serpent-rods of the Egyptians. No contest – God one, Egypt zero. Since the staff is a symbol of authority, the destruction of the Egyptian staffs represents the superiority of God’s power over Pharaoh.

In this initial confrontation, God scores an immediate victory over the spiritual forces of darkness. However, this prologue to the ten plagues also serves to foreshadow the ultimate victory of God over Egypt. The Hebrew word for “swallow” here in 7:12 is also used in 15:12 to describe how the Red Sea “swallowed” the forces of Pharaoh’s army.

What is Pharaoh’s response to the superior display of God’s power in swallowing up the staffs of his court magicians? “And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said” (7:13). Get used to this refrain. We are going to hear it a lot in the next several weeks. God gave Pharaoh his sign, but it did him no good. Currid summarizes:

Even with the physical evidence before him, Pharaoh does not believe. He simply will not be persuaded, no matter how much evidence is placed before his eyes. And that is true of unbelievers throughout the ages (Mt. 13:13). People cannot be talked into the kingdom of God. There is no burden of proof in human logic or physical attestation. People need to have their hearts changed by the will and power of the Creator. There is no other way.

### **C. Plague 1: Blood (7:14-25)**

#### **1. Plague Announced (7:14-18)**

The first plague is a judgment against the Nile and the gods of Egypt associated with this river. The Nile was the source of Egypt’s wealth and of their very existence. It provided water to drink and to bathe and to irrigate their crops. The annual flood of the river deposited rich soil that was the basis of their agriculture. In fact, the Nile was the main source of water for the entire kingdom of Egypt. As such, it was revered as a god. Thus, by attacking the Nile River, God was declaring war on Egypt – on their economy, on their religion, and on their way of life.

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Furthermore, this first plague on the Nile was also a response to the wickedness of the Egyptians eighty years previously as they attempted to kill the Hebrew children by drowning them in the river. God has not forgotten the blood of His people shed by Egypt in this river. Soon, God will make the river turn to blood to avenge their deaths.

God tells Moses to meet Pharaoh by the river “in the morning” (7:15). This is the pattern of the first plague of each cycle. Pharaoh went to the river with a hard heart (7:14), literally a “heavy” (*kabed*) heart. Pharaoh’s heart was hard or heavy towards the LORD. Commentators speculate why Pharaoh was going to the Nile in the morning. While he may have been going to take a bath like an earlier pharaoh’s daughter did eighty years previously (2:5), it is more likely that he was going to the river to worship one of the Nile gods. In particular, Hapi, the Egyptian god of fertility associated with the annual flood of the Nile is often mentioned by commentators.

God’s message to Pharaoh is simple and remains the same throughout the plagues: “Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness” (7:16). This is the theme of the exodus; this is the reason God saves His people – that they may worship Him. God desires His people to worship and serve Him. This was true in the days of Moses, and it is true today. We are called to serve Him, “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

Of course, God knows that Pharaoh will not listen because his heart is hard. Therefore, He announces the first plague of blood with this purpose: “By this you shall know that I am the LORD” (7:17). Pharaoh needs to know who God is, not just to be acquainted with Him, but to understand truly who the LORD is. True knowledge of the LORD means more than understanding facts; it “involves submission to the authority of the LORD” (Mackay). As we have already seen, knowledge of the LORD is one of the main purposes of the ten plagues.

### **2. *Plague Enacted (7:19-21)***

In verses 19-21 the plague is enacted just as God has declared. Aaron lifts up his rod over the Nile River and it turns to blood. In addition, all the ground water—the streams, the rivers, the ponds, the pools—turns to blood. Some commentators (such as Cole) try to find naturalistic explanations for this phenomenon, such as red clay or red plankton being washed into the river. Of course, this does not explain the extent of the plague, the appearance of the plague at God’s command, the death of the fish, or the reaction of the Egyptians. If this were a common occurrence, then it would hardly be sufficient to demonstrate the power and authority of God. No, we must stick to the plain text of the Scriptures and insist that God supernaturally intervened into creation and turned the water into blood.

This plague must have been awful. The stench of dead and decaying fish and the smell of rotting blood would have been everywhere. The Egyptians must have become desperate to find alternate sources of drinking water to replace the Nile River. And perhaps worst of all, their faith in the power of the Nile god had to have been shaken. If the God of the Hebrew slaves could humble the Nile River, what did that say about the pantheon of Egypt?

### **3. *Plague Duplicated (7:22-25)***

Although most of the water in Egypt had been turned to blood, apparently not all of had. In verse 24, we see the Egyptians digging in the ground for sources of fresh water, since their normal water supply had turned to blood. And in verse 22 we see the court magicians of Egypt duplicating the miracle of God by turning water into blood. Of course, their black arts were

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merely imitating the power of God on a vastly smaller scale. God turned the entire Nile River and its tributaries to blood; the magicians turn a few bowls of water into blood. Still, it was enough to convince Pharaoh that he didn't need to submit to God's authority. And so we read in verse 22 that Pharaoh's heart was – you guessed it – hard.

This first plague lasted for seven days: a perfect length of time to demonstrate the superiority of the LORD over the gods of Egypt. Seven days of suffering and oppression. But this was only the beginning. If you think the first plague is bad, hold onto your hats; we have nine more to go. Let the plagues begin!

### Conclusion

#### *1. Theological*

There is a relationship between God's work of salvation through the plagues and His work of Creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). But God acts in history at times to overrule or reverse His creation. For example, the Great Flood of Noah's day can be considered a "de-creation" of the world, a return to the state of the world where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters before speaking the first word of the original creation (*cp.* Gen. 1:2). The prophets also often use the language of de-creation to foretell judgment. For example:

<sup>2</sup>"I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land," says the LORD; <sup>3</sup>"I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land," says the LORD (Zephaniah 1:2-3).

Thus, God can reverse His very creation to pour judgment on His enemies. This is what happens to Egypt during the ten plagues. But at the same time, this "de-creation" also can represent salvation for the righteous, as in the case of Noah or of Israel during the exodus. God uses the forces of creation at His disposal to bring His enemies to justice and His people to salvation.

#### *2. Christological*

The ultimate example of God's control over the creation as applied to our salvation is in the New Testament. Enns remarks:

Like Moses, Jesus has command over the elements. He walks on water; He commands the storms to cease; He provides a miraculous supply of fish and bread; He makes a fig tree wither. These well-known incidents show that He, like the God of Exodus, has creation at His disposal. That He is able to do these things is nothing less than a clear indication that the God of the Old Testament is walking among His people, once again manipulating the created order to bring blessing and relief to His people.

It is no coincidence that the language of salvation is intertwined with the language of creation: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Our salvation comes from the reversal of the old creation order. Jesus Christ defeats death and brings new life where only sin and decay had existed previously. Salvation is an act of new creation, but there is still an element of the "now and not yet" in our salvation. We still await the final day when this old creation will pass away and Jesus Christ says, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

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### 3. *Practical*

What lessons should we take away from our study of the ten plagues, and particularly the first plague? I am struck by the two statements that God makes to Pharaoh before He inaugurates the first plague. God wants us to *serve* Him (7:16) and to *know* Him (7:17).

Do we really know God? Do we really desire to understand who He is and what He has done? But even more importantly, do we really seek to submit ourselves to His authority? Knowledge of God is more than intellectual assent. Even the demons believe there is one God (James 2:19), and they tremble with that knowledge because they have not submitted to His authority. They know that one day they will be destroyed, and yet they cannot and will not submit. In that sense, they are like Pharaoh who was shown the truth about who God was, and yet chose to ignore it, hardening his heart to his eternal peril.

Instead, true knowledge of God “requires submission to the covenant King and trusting obedience to Him and reliance upon Him” (Mackay). True knowledge is essential for salvation:

<sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

How can we know God? Through the Scriptures, through Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, through prayer, and through worship. It is this last item that is the theme of the exodus: God saves us and gives us true knowledge of Him, in order that we may serve Him and worship Him.

Worship is not just a nice thing to do; it is an essential part of who we are as Christians. We have been saved for worship, to give glory and praise to our Savior. It is true worship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that distinguishes us and marks us as Christians. The Egyptians had their pantheon of gods, including Hapi of the Nile River. Most Americans don’t worship superstitious idols today, but as Ryken points out, they worship the modern equivalents:

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile; we follow the NASDAQ — they are just two different names for the same god. Rather than trusting in God alone, we depend on economic growth, rapid transportation, and prepackaged foods. We even have our own creation myth. Believing in Darwinism is really just another way to worship Hapi. What would happen if all these things were taken away? Imagine what life in these United States would be like if the stock market collapsed, the price of gas rose to forty dollars a gallon, the supply of drinking water was contaminated, and grocery stores started running out of food. Can you imagine the utter chaos that would ensue? There would be rioting in the streets, death and destruction in every city. The practical application is very simple: We are to worship God by trusting in Him alone for everything we need. If we trust in other gods for our peace and prosperity, we will be disappointed in the end. But if we place our confidence in God alone as our Creator and Provider, then even when everything else is taken away, we will stand secure.

True knowledge of God leads to true service and worship. May we know God and serve Him faithfully. Amen.

Close in Prayer.

Next week: Lesson 9 – Plagued by Plagues – Ex. 8:1-9:12