



7. Plague! (part 2) Exodus 7-11

We saw last week how Moses and Aaron's second encounter with Pharaoh seemed as fruitless as the first in one sense. But it was all a precursor to something far worse – ten plagues. Take a look at the sheet and you'll see all 10 together with a few summary points. I suppose what I have to say tonight is not a detailed Bible study of all ten plagues – it's more a few reflections I feel God has challenged me to give to you.

What was clear from last week was that Pharaoh was confident in himself that the God of some slave nation was inferior to his gods and himself. After all the Israelites were in bondage weren't they? In fact Pharaoh's magicians could replicate the miracle with the snakes. Even though Aaron's snake ate his up, he seems to have had confidence in Egyptian superiority and wasn't threatened and it's interesting to see how he responded to these plagues. He seems to have been taken apart piece by piece as he stubbornly resisted God.

So here are 10 plagues and they are an attack on Egypt in almost every department of life – on its lifeline – water, on its wildlife, on its people, on its domestic animals, on its agriculture, on its climate, on its society and finally on its civilisation.

Egyptian civilisation was based on the Nile. They harnessed the Nile for irrigation and had advanced agriculture. Their ability to control the Nile meant that they did not suffer the vagaries of the climate. Proximity to the desert meant that plagues of insects and locusts were rare. The quality of the water meant that disease did not spread readily amongst people and cattle. They had a complex urban society and made advances in medicine and science. They built cities and attributed their success to their gods. They built enormous edifices to them and massive graves for the great leaders in their society. Egypt encouraged many people to come there in search of work – like people from Canaan and we already know that the Egyptians exploited them in order to build their wealth.

And because religion was the backbone of Egyptian society – their largest and most ornate buildings (apart from the pyramids) were temples, we see this also as a battle between the gods of Egyptians and Yahweh the God of the Israelites. One of the most enduring themes of the OT and probably of scripture is that God is a jealous God. He deserves all our adoration and worship and He doesn't share it with idols who are made of wood and stone, which have been inspired by the enemy and grounded in the demonic – it's idolatry. Look at the 10 commandments and you'll see what I mean – it's right at the top.

Right through the history of Israel, the people were judged because they turned away from their God to worship lumps of wood and stone – Baal, Asherah and the rest. It was never an abandonment of God, simply an embrace of other gods within their life and society.

And it's as much of a challenge in 2008 as it was then. If we share our worship with anyone or anything else, then it's idolatry. Are we sharing our worship with anything else or anyone else? It's easily done – something or someone that takes up our attention and excludes God. Why do people fall away – because something else or someone else has taken God's place. But we do not have to go 100% down the road and abandon our faith to do much the same. There are lots of people who divide their week into God's bit and their bit. And He doesn't get a look-in except on Sunday.

Back to the plagues. Now look at the plagues and you'll see that, taken together, they would have devastated Egyptian society. Some were more significant than others but all 10 would have been a disaster for Egypt – no wonder they were keen to push the Israelites out in the end out as God had said.

If you look down the list of plagues, you'll see that the effect would have intensified as they went on.

The first four were dramatic but would not have led to many deaths because they were not prolonged and significant enough – they were just a nuisance. They were the equivalent of warning shots across the bow. In fact, Pharaoh's magicians could replicate the first two.

And Pharaoh's response – we find that Pharaoh's heart was hardened by them. Why? Look at it from his perspective. The plagues weren't having a major effect. If we look in the respite column we'll see that the plagues were stopped before anyone got really hurt. They were inconvenient. How dare the Israelites try to hold him to ransom? It rather reminds me of politicians who are opposed by others who they do not want to give way to. As soon as the people try to take direct action that may be peaceful but inconvenient; what do they do? They get their backs up and dig their heels in. How dare these people question their authority?

And that's Pharaoh – his back is up in the first couple but by the flies he starts to compromise. With some of the later ones he says "I have sinned" but each time he goes back on what he said.

Let's ask ourselves the question – when the Lord prompts us, how do we respond? One of the ways in which many Christians respond to the word of God is not to listen but to find excuses that it doesn't apply to them, or other things are more important, or God won't do anything really nasty to them if they ignore Him. I find this is most common in Christian attitudes to prayer. Getting to grips with God, individually and particularly corporately is the absolute life blood of effective Christian witness and growth. Look at any situation where people aren't coming to Christ or the church is not growing and you'll find the simple obedience of prayer missing.

And when God is ignored the promptings get sharper. By the time we get to plague 5 then things are getting dramatic. It's an attack on their cattle. They played a big role in the life of Egypt. You'll see images of Apis in many Egyptian temples. He was supposed to be a powerful god. Cattle become diseased and die all over Egypt. There was no respite. It was horrific and a disaster for Egypt. And Pharaoh remained stubborn.. Again Pharaoh's back is up.

The plagues are of course a response to Pharaoh hardening his heart. Each time the plague comes to an end, his heart was hardened and so Moses and Aaron come back and warn him again that if he does not stop – another plague will come. That's with the exception of lice and darkness where on each occasion Pharaoh relents and then changes his mind – immediately the plague starts unannounced. It was a direct response to Pharaoh reneging on his promise.

He should have seen he was out of his depth by the end of number 5. After that we don't read of how Pharaoh got his back up but that God hardened his heart. I often wondered about this. Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart and then punish Egypt with something worse because he continued to resist God. Was that fair? God is a just God so there is a reason for it.

It's a case of opportunity to repent giving way to judgement. He had his chance after half the plagues now God hardens his heart and plagues 6-10 all involve destruction and death in Egypt and eventually in Pharaoh's household. What happened was not without warning and a response to decades, possibly centuries of Israelite slavery and genocide at the hands of the Egyptians.

We all know that judgement is a certain consequence of sin. For those without Christ, it is an eternal consequence. And people think that because God does not strike them down where they are, that they think they have got away with it. But of course, we're all good evangelicals and we know that God is extending His day of grace that bit longer to allow people an opportunity to repent. Grab that truth – hang on to it and pray that God will send out workers into His harvest field. Bringing people to Christ isn't something we kind of do if we sort of feel moved to do it. It's a matter of life and death.

We also know that God brings temporal judgement to those who try His patience to the limit. Do not bring the Lord your God to the test. And we know that and we don't push our luck with God do we?

The problem is that so often we're no better than those who are lost (actually because we are no better than the ones who are lost). We push our luck with God. We know what we should be like. We know what's good for us. And we don't do it.

I bet the Israelites were really pleased when they saw the Egyptians getting the punishment. Served them right didn't it? Whilst Egypt suffered from flies and hail and darkness and the rest, Goshen where they lived was left clear. But in the end when it came to the death of the first born, even they were affected when the blood was not on the doorposts and lintels.

The bottom line is that if we have any area of disobedience in our lives, be it a compulsion, or unconfessed sin, or idolatry or unforgiveness, God will catch up with us. Any we may have the promise of eternal life, but we'll never achieve our potential in Christ through disobedience. I have seen the lives of so many Christians blighted by simple disobedience. And if I'm honest with myself, I know there are still areas of my life that need to be much more surrendered to the will of Christ.

Final challenge.

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Scripture Quotes TEV

The 10 Plagues

Plague	Warning	Replication	Respite	Response	God Attacked
Water into Blood	Pharoah was warned and allowed to watch	Yes	The Egyptians managed to work around the problem	Pharoahs heart was hardened	Hapi (the God of the Nile)
Frogs	Pharoah warned but was not with Moses when it happened	Yes	Pharoah named the time the frogs would go	Compromise but then Pharoah hardened his heart	Heqt (interestingly many frogs was usually viewed as a good thing)
Lice	No Warning	No. The magicians saw the lice as an act of God	We're not told but presumably the effects would have not been lasting.	Pharoahs heart was hardened. He doesn't even speak to Moses.	Kheper (God of beetles and flies)
Flies	Pharoah warned but not with Moses when it happened	No. In fact they didn't even try	The flies were removed when Pharoah promised to let the Israelites go	Pharoah hardened his heart	Kheper
Murrain	Pharoah warned and told when it would happen	Again they didn't try	It was a one off action.. but the cattle stayed dead.	The heart of Pharoah was hardened.	Apis (Sacred Bull)
Boils	Pharoah not warned but was there when Moses did it	Magicians could not even heal themselves	We're not told but one would imagine scarring would result	The Lord hardened Pharoah's heart.	Imhotep (physician God) & Thoth (Magic and healing)
Hail	Pharoah and servants warned. Those that heeded the warning escaped.	Didn't try.	No respite, crops destroyed although some crops left.	Pharoah admits sin but then sins more by hardening his heart	Nut (Sky Goddess)
Locusts	Pharoah warned and his servants almost cause him to give in	Didn't try	Complete devastation, this years harvest gone.	Pharoah acts in haste and compromises. The Lord hardens Pharoahs heart.	Seth (God of Crops)
Dark	No Warning	Didn't try	Yes, three days only	Pharoah heart hardened by God. Tells Moses to 'get out of sight'	Ra (Sun God)
First Born	Yes	No	No – firstborn dead	Israelites let go	Pharoah

Source: <http://www.dabhand.org/Ten%20Plagues.htm>