

INTRODUCTION:

In dealing with Egypt God does not send plagues or judgments until after Pharaoh has rejected God's miraculous demonstration that His power is greater than that of the gods of Egypt, which occurs when Aaron's staff swallows the staffs of the Egyptian sorcerers. Even the plagues form a pattern of mercy in that God has the authority and power to destroy Egypt from the outset, but chooses instead to send a series of worsening plagues as warnings and punishments to demonstrate His power and to force Pharaoh to let His people go. The first two plagues will be countered with arrogance as the sorcerers of Egypt are able through their magic arts to duplicate (on a much smaller and limited scale) the powers exhibited by God. The third plague then makes the distinction that God can do things that the sorcerers cannot. The fourth plague makes a distinction between the Egyptians and God's own people, in that from this plague onward, God will protect His people and the plagues will only strike the Egyptians. Also note that the plagues seem to come in three sets of three (a three-fold signature of God), each becoming progressively worse, and then followed by the final plague. This is a pattern that is repeated in the Book of Revelation in the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls of wrath. The plagues of Egypt which fall upon a hard-hearted Pharaoh, punish those who hold God's people captive and free God's people from bondage. These are a precursor to the great tribulation that will come upon the entire world, punishing the hard-hearted who have rejected God and freeing God's people from bondage to the dark powers of this world.

THE SIGNS BEFORE PHARAOH:

God sends a sign of his superiority and power before punishments will begin, but Pharaoh rejects God's sign and his heart is hardened.

(Pharaoh's heart will harden.)

Exodus 7:2-4

(2) "You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. (3) But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. (4) 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."

Comments:

Those who have long persisted in the ways of evil reach a point at which they are unable to distinguish right from wrong or good from evil. They grow hardened and morally incorrigible. Without doubt this was the state of Pharaoh. Being a man accustomed to the abuse of power, he steeled himself against all sense of justice and mercy. In Romans 1:24, God is said to have given up immoral men to the path they were determined to follow. In the same way God allowed Pharaoh to follow the course he was determined to follow. God did not force him to act in an evil way nor did He by divine decree determine that Pharaoh would not repent if he so chose.

(Pharaoh rejects signs.)**Exodus 7:8-13**

(8) Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, (9) *"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.'"* (10) 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. (11) 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. (12) For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. (13) Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Comments:

Even though God demonstrated His power to be greater than that of Egypt's gods, Pharaoh was unimpressed and still refused to let the people go.

THE PLAGUES:

As previously stated in the introduction there will be three sets of three progressively worsening plagues followed by a final plague which will force Pharaoh to release God's people. God will make distinctions in plagues three and four that His power is superior to the dark powers of this world and that He can protect His own while punishing the guilty. The first nine plagues demonstrate God's mercy as well as His power. They also demonstrate that God truly does judge the wicked and deliver His children.

FIRST CYCLE OF PLAGUES:

In the first cycle of three plagues God works through the forces of nature to show His unequalled power. The first two plagues are announced before hand and Pharaoh's sorcerers are able to duplicate them to some limited extent. We sometimes disregard God because we think we have the power to duplicate His actions. But there is no comparison between the power of God and our own as demonstrated in God's ability to turn water to blood even in vessels of wood and clay, and to turn on or end the plague of frogs at His command. Likewise, in the third plague of gnats, Pharaoh's sorcerers cannot duplicate God's actions and acknowledge God's superiority. It is also noteworthy that in the second plague of frogs that Pharaoh agrees to let God's people go in order to stop the plague but then refuses to follow through after the plague is removed. This is reminiscent to our own behavior when we turn to God for help in times of trouble, and then after God has rescued us from our affliction, we again turn away from Him and continue to pretend that we can get along without Him.

(First Plague: Water to blood.)

Exodus 7:14-22

(14) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. (15) Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. (16) You shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.' (17) '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. (18) 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.'"* (19) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"* (20) So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the

water that *was* in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that *was* in the Nile was turned to blood. (21) The fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. (22) But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Comments:

Even though Pharaoh's sorcerers can duplicate the act of turning water to blood through their magic arts, God demonstrates His superior power by turning all the water in Egypt to blood, including not only the Nile but the water in wood and clay vessels not connected to the Nile. Pharaoh demonstrates the same belief many people emulate today, that is that if we can grow food and heal bodies and do other things that God can do then we don't need God, or even worse, there is no God and religion is nothing more than magic and tricks.

(Second Plague: Frogs.)**Exodus 8:1-8, 13-15**

(1) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (2) But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. (3) The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. (4) So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.'"* (5) 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.'"* (6) So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. (7) The magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt. (8) Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, *"Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD."*

(13) The LORD did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. (14) So they piled them in heaps, and the land became foul. (15) But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Comments:

The second plague was announced beforehand like the first and Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to duplicate it in limited way as in the first, but it was so much more severe that Pharaoh relented and agreed to let God's people go. But when the plague was removed, Pharaoh again turned his back on God and refused to do as he agreed.

(Third Plague: Gnats.)**Exodus 8:16-19**

(16) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.'"* (17) 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. (18) The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. (19) Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, *"This is the finger of God."* But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Comments:

The third plague is unannounced to Pharaoh and follows immediately after he reneges after agreeing to let God's people go. It is also the first plague than cannot be duplicated by Pharaoh's sorcerers, thus God makes the distinction that His powers are superior over those of Egypt's gods.

SECOND CYCLE OF PLAGUES:

Beginning with the fourth plague God proves that He is truly in control regarding the plagues in that He can direct the plagues to inflict only those He chooses and at the specific time He sets. God sends the fourth and following plagues only against the Egyptians and not His own people, making a distinction between the two and demonstrating that God has the power to judge and deliver. In the fourth plague Pharaoh

attempts to negotiate with God, requesting a compromise, and ultimately again agrees to let God's people go and worship in the desert in order to end the plague. But after the plague is removed, he again reneges on his agreement and refuses to let God's people go. God responds with the fifth and sixth plagues, respectively upon the Egyptian livestock and people, causing disease on the livestock and boils on livestock and people. The fifth is announced but the sixth is not although God commands it be initiated in the sight of Pharaoh so that he will know that the affliction is a plague sent by God. While plagues one through four had caused great discomfort, plague five and those that followed would begin to destroy the Egyptians' property and prosperity.

(Fourth Plague: Flies.)

Exodus 8:20-32

(20) Now the LORD said to Moses, *"Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (21) For if you do not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of insects on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians will be full of swarms of insects, and also the ground on which they dwell. (22) But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of insects will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. (23) I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will occur.'"* (24)

Then the LORD did so. And there came great swarms of insects into the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and the land was laid waste because of the swarms of insects in all the land of Egypt. (25) Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, *"Go, sacrifice to your God within the land."* (26) But Moses said, *"It is not right to do so, for we will sacrifice to the LORD our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us? (27) We must go a three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us."* (28) Pharaoh said, *"I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make supplication for me."* (29) Then Moses said, *"Behold, I am going out from you, and I shall make supplication to the LORD that the swarms of insects may depart*

from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow; only do not let Pharaoh deal deceitfully again in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” (30) So Moses went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. (31) The LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people; not one remained. (32) But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.

Comments:

With the fourth plague Pharaoh tries to negotiate with God and reach a compromise, but God through Moses reveals that God’s commands have a purpose according to God’s plan and must be followed without compromise. Like Pharaoh, we often attempt to negotiate with God and compromise our faith by not doing all that God commands. When we do so we only bring more harm upon ourselves and obstruct the deliverance and blessing that God desires.

(Fifth Plague: Disease on livestock.)**Exodus 9:1-7**

(1) Then the LORD said to Moses, ***“Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (2) For if you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them, (3) behold, the hand of the LORD will come with a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. (4) But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel.’”*** (5) The LORD set a definite time, saying, ***“Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.”*** (6) 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. (7) Pharaoh sent, and behold, there was not even one of the livestock of Israel dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

Comments:

With the fifth plague God not only demonstrates that He can control who the plagues afflict, but also, the precise time in which they will occur.

(Sixth Plague: Boils.)**Exodus 9:8-12**

(8) Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, *"Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. (9) It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt."* (10) 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. (11) The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. (12) And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

Comments:

The sixth plague is not announced but initiated in the sight of Pharaoh so that he may know that it is sent by God. For the first time the Egyptian people are directly afflicted with boils, and even the sorcerers are afflicted, making it clear that no one can stand against the power of God.

THIRD CYCLE OF PLAGUES:

The third and final cycle of plagues bring both opportunity for mercy and the most severe judgments thus far. God provides warning with the seventh plague that those Egyptians who heed His warning can shelter themselves, their servants and their remaining livestock from destruction, but those who will not heed will perish. The seventh and eighth plagues destroy all of Egypt's crops and both times Pharaoh attempts to negotiate. In the seventh plague he offers to release the men only, knowing that they will return if their women and children remain behind. In the eighth, he offers to let the people go if the livestock stays behind. Pharaoh does understand that partial compliance with God's commands is not enough. God also reveals in the seventh plague that the plagues are not intended purely to gain release for His people but as an example to the entire world of His sovereignty. The ninth plague will plunge Egypt into darkness for three days—a darkness that even precludes artificial light except in the houses of the Israelites. Three days of darkness proceeding deliverance will become a repeated pattern in Scripture.

(Seventh Plague: Hail.)**Exodus 9:13-35**

(13) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (14) For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. (15) For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. (16) But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. (17) Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go. (18) Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. (19) Now therefore send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home, when the hail comes down on them, will die.'"* (20) The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; (21) but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field. (22) Now the LORD said to Moses, *"Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt."* (23) 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. (24) 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. (25) 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. (26) Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail.

(27) Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, *"I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. (28) Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."* (29) Moses said to him, *"As soon as*

I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD'S. (30) But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." (31) (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. (32) But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late.) (33) So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth. (34) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. (35) Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Comments:

The seventh plague is filled with God's mercy. God not only announces but warns the Egyptians so that those who chose to heed God's warning could bring themselves, their servants and their animals under cover and escape the plague. God also continued to make the distinction between His own people and the Egyptians with the plague not falling on the land of Goshen. Only those Egyptians that were openly defiant and choose to stay out in the open would suffer the plague, and only a portion of the crops would be destroyed preserving a remnant of food so that the people would not starve. Again Pharaoh agrees to release God's people to stop the plague and again he reneges when the danger has passed. God will always win in a battle of wills, but even in judgment God's mercy continues to be available to those who will heed His Word.

(Eighth Plague: Locusts.)**Exodus 10:1-20**

(1) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, (2) and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD." (3) Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (4) For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. (5) They

shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They will also eat the rest of what has escaped -- what is left to you from the hail -- and they will eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. (6) Then your houses shall be filled and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians, something which neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day that they came upon the earth until this day." And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

(7) Pharaoh's servants said to him, *"How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?"* (8) So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, *"Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?"* (9) Moses said, *"We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD."* (10) Then [Pharaoh] said to them, *"Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. (11) Not so! Go now, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire."* So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

(12) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt and eat every plant of the land, even all that the hail has left."* (13) 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. (14) 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. (15) 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.

(16) Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, *"I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. (17) Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me."* (18) He went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to

the LORD. (19) So the LORD shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. (20) But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.

Comments:

With the announcement of the eighth plague which will destroy the remainder of the Egyptians crops, the people of Egypt pressure Pharaoh to submit to God's demands. Pharaoh calls Moses and Aaron back and asks them who will be going, and Moses responds informing Pharaoh that everyone from the youngest child to the oldest adult along with their flocks and herds will be departing. Pharaoh is only ready for a partial departure and becomes angry, mocking Moses by saying that he will be blessed if ever Pharaoh allows the little ones to leave. Pharaoh accuses Moses of evil thoughts and commands him to take the men only, stating that that was all Moses really desired. Pharaoh knows that without their women and children the men will return and thus continue to be his slaves. Pharaoh's refusal to allow all God's people go brings down the eight plague upon Egypt. Pharaoh again relents, but after the plague has ended, reneges.

(Ninth Plague: Darkness.)**Exodus 10:21-29**

(21) Then the LORD said to Moses, *"Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt."* (22) So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. (23) They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. (24) Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, *"Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you."* (25) But Moses said, *"You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice them to the LORD our God. (26) Therefore, our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD."* (27) But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. (28) Then Pharaoh said to him, *"Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the*

day you see my face you shall die!" (29) Moses said, "You are right; I shall never see your face again!"

Comments:

The ninth plague comes without announcement, plunging all of Egypt into three days of darkness, reminiscent to the three days of darkness Jonah will experience in the belly of a great fish when he rejected the Lord's command and the three days of darkness between the crucifixion and the resurrection when the world rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Three days of darkness will be suffered before the final plague and God delivers His people. Pharaoh is still not willing to fully submit to God's commands, still attempting to negotiate that the livestock be left behind. God requires we submit everything to Him—all that we have and all that we are—not just a portion or token to get Him to let us go. To the Egyptians, whose most powerful god was “Re” the Sun god,” God's plunging the land into darkness would have represented a clear and overwhelming defeat of their most powerful deity. God's sovereignty over Egypt and its gods has been clearly established.

Scriptures from the New American Standard Bible.

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