

Preparing for Passover - The Plagues

The Plagues prepared Israel for the Exodus by showing them the powerlessness of Egypt's false gods.

Each individual plague was meant to desecrate and embarrass one or several of the gods Egyptians put their trust in.

- **Exodus 12:12** - "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment."

As we prepare for Passover, we must see these plagues "disenchanted" each of the false gods we trust in. The Plagues are meant to bring us to repentance, so that we will want to leave Egypt.

This happens in our hearts, as it did in Pharaoh's:

- **Exodus 9:14** - "For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth."

The story is a warning - we don't want God to harden our heart as he did Pharaoh's:

Rabbi Shimon b. Lakish replied: "Let the mouths of the heretics be stopped up ... when God warns a man once, twice, and even a third time, and he still does not repent, then does God close his heart against repentance so that He should exact vengeance from him for his sins. Thus it was with the wicked Pharaoh. Since God sent five times to him and he took no notice, God then said: 'You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart; well, I will add to your uncleanness.'" (Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 13:3)

This agrees with the dictum "after three times reject."

- **Titus 3:10** - "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject"

Solomon prayed:

- **1 Kings 8:37-38** - "If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)"

We each have a "plague on our hearts" which can turn us to repentance.

The Plagues

1. Turning the Nile to blood: Ex. 7:14–24

The Nile shared honors with Ra, the sun God. Egypt depended on the Nile for life. Turning it to blood indicated death, and made it undrinkable. Whatever is life to us, wherever we have sought nourishment elsewhere, God has shown it to be death instead.

This was also a judgment of the Egyptians for killing the Israelite babies:

Exodus 1:22 - "...Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" i.e the Nile

2. Frogs: Ex. 7:25–8:11/15

Frogs represented Heka, a fertility goddess. God taken our ideas of success, abundance, creativity out to the limit, so we can see its emptiness, and our true poverty and need. Also, the primordial gods Nun, Kek and Heh were each depicted as a man with a frog's head.

3. Lice or gnats: Ex. 8:12–15/8:16–19

The dust of the land (represented by Geb, the earth god) is a stand in for our flesh, our earthen vessel. It becomes an irritant - lice - causing us to loath it, as Job said: "Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (**Job 42:6**).

4. Flies (or, wild animals): Ex. 8:16–28/8:20–32

A major tenet of Egyptian religion was cleanness. Priests shaved their hair and temples had to be scrupulously clean. The flies entered their "houses" which means their temples, polluting them. This plague should make us realize our ideas of god, prayer and worship and our idolatry are filled with pollution. (The Hebrew word "swarms" could also include the sacred dung beetles).

5. Pestilence on livestock: Ex. 9:1–7

Murrain killed all the cattle, which were sacred. For instance, Apis was represented as a bull and Isis and Hathor as a cow. To get rid of the carcasses, they burned the bodies, which filled the nostrils of everyone with the stench of death.

6. Boils: Ex. 9:8–12

Jewish tradition says the oven from which Moses took the ashes was used for human sacrifice, which ancient peoples engaged in in times of crisis. The sacrifice was offered to Typhon, the god of evil. The ashes became dust and caused the people to break out in boils. The flesh became death. This discredited Nefertem, god of healing, as well as Isis and Osiris. This plague hopefully shows us the true human condition - "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores" (**Isaiah 1:1-6**)

7. Hail mixed with fire: Ex. 9:13–35

This was probably directed against Isis and Osiris, the gods of national health, fertility and natural fruitfulness. Also, Nut, the sky goddess and Seth, god of storms and protector of crops. Hail is said to "sweep away our refuge of lies" (**Isaiah 28:2-18**) God will sweep away any false and deceptive covering we are depending on.

8. Locusts: Ex. 10:1–20

The god Serapis promised protection against locusts. Anubis was supposed be the "guardian of the fields." In certain conditions after heavy rains, grasshoppers will start to congregate together, rub against each other and turn into locusts. They become an all-consuming plague destroying every living plant. They reveal our own self-seeking gone wild and taken to the end. God sees natural man as locusts "the inhabitants thereof are like grasshoppers (locusts)" (**Isaiah 40:22**)

9. Darkness for three days: Ex. 10:21–29

Darkness was directed against the sun god Ra. By taking away the sun's light, God showed the Egyptians their spiritual darkness while discrediting Ra. It also reveals our hate for one another: "He that walketh in darkness hateth his brother." (**1 John 2:7-11**)

10. Death of firstborn son: Ex. 11:1–12:36

This happened while Israel was inside their dwellings, eating the Passover lamb. Meshkenet, the goddess who presided at the birth of children, failed to save the firstborn. Our natural "first-born" is Adam. But our real identity is Christ. The blood on the doorposts in the sign of the cross indicated to the death angel that those inside were already considered dead.

Finally, Pharaoh was a god himself. His defeat at the Red Sea was God's judgment on Pharaoh.

When we realize there is a plague on our heart, we need healing.

Deuteronomy 7:15 - "And the LORD will remove from you all sickness. He will not lay upon you any of the terrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but He will inflict them on all who hate you."

Exodus 15:26 - "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His eyes, and pay attention to His commands, and keep all His statutes, then I will not bring on you any of the diseases I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."

The diseases were the plagues. The cross is the cure.

Isaiah 53:5 - "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes, we are healed."

The poet John Keats in his work "Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil" describes a woman who keeps the severed head of her lover buried in a pot in her garden. She continues to mourn for him and spends all her time there, even though
- "The thing was vile with green and livid spot"

This is not only disgusting, but borders on madness. But consider - are we longing for old idols, or looking back like Lot's wife did toward Sodom? That's why we study these plagues God sent on the gods of Egypt. We want them all banished from our consciousness.

Isaiah 26:13-14 - "O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."

We don't want to take Egyptian worship or culture with us as we flee slavery in Egypt:

Isaiah 5:18 - "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope"

The real image here is that we die to self, Our old identity - Pharaoh - is left dead in the Red Sea along with his army and all their idols, while our new man, Christ, emerges on the opposite shore. A new creation!