

The Exodus: The Plagues Begin

Read Exodus 7:8 – 9:7

Moses' second meeting with Pharaoh goes as expected. Moses and Aaron work the miracle that God had prepared for them. But when the sorcerers of Egypt simulate the miracle, Pharaoh hardens his heart, as God said he would (7:8-13).

But that small miracle with the staff and the snake is only God's warm-up act. It is a shot over Pharaoh's bow. When Pharaoh refuses God's demand a second time, God unleashes the dramatic series of plagues for which the Exodus is famous. God uses Pharaoh's stubborn unbelief as an opportunity to demonstrate His power and to judge Egypt for abusing Israel, His firstborn son (4:22-23). Here is a summary of the plagues:

1. Water to blood (7:14-24)

All the water in Egypt turns to blood - the Nile, streams, ponds, reservoirs, even the water stored in containers. The fish die, and the Nile smells terrible. But when the magicians simulate the miracle, Pharaoh remains unmoved and unconcerned.

2. Frogs (8:1-15)

Seven days pass after the previous plague, and now frogs are everywhere: in houses, beds, food, etc. The magicians simulate the miracle, but Pharaoh relents and promises to let Israel go. Moses allows Pharaoh to set the time when all the frogs would die, except for those in the Nile. But when the frogs go on cue, so does Pharaoh's cooperation.

3. Gnats (8:16-19)

Throughout Egypt, the dust turns to gnats - everywhere and on everything and everyone. The magicians cannot duplicate the miracle and tell Pharaoh, "*This is the finger of God*" (v.19, NASB). But Pharaoh refuses to listen.

4. Swarms (8:20-32)

God announces that Egypt will be full of "swarms", referring in general to pesky insects or vermin, or perhaps specifically to flies. The ground, the houses, everywhere and everything in all of Egypt would be full of them. But now He goes further: He announces that while Egypt is full of the pests, it will be life as usual in Goshen, where the Israelites live. It happens as God said. Pharaoh tries to bargain with Moses, then finally agrees to terms. But when Moses takes care of the flies, Pharaoh is hardened again.

5. Plague on livestock (9:1-7)

God next sends a severe pestilence that kills all the livestock of the Egyptians: horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. At the same time, He announces that no plague would strike Israel's livestock. God's word comes true, but Pharaoh doesn't yield. Notice that with this plague, God's judgment on Egypt escalates. We've moved beyond temporary annoyance. Substantial damage is being done.

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