



### **EXODUS 8-12 THE LAST SEVEN PLAGUES**

In this Bible study, we will cover the last remaining seven plagues and their relationship with the Egyptian gods. Some critics, trying to deny that these were miracles produced by God, have attempted to give them a natural explanation. Yet, the fact is that there were ten of them, all started and ended at *precisely* the time God commanded and most did not affect the Israelites at all, thus eliminating any other explanation. In addition, it is important to note that the *sequence* of these plagues is intended to show the fraudulent nature of the principal Egyptian gods (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4).

We will briefly review the first three plagues, and some of the primary gods associated with them. Since Egyptians considered the Nile River the source of their great civilization, they worshipped *Hapi*, the Nile God, that supposedly made the Nile overflow from its banks every year and brought this free and rich fertilization of the land. The Nile was also the principal source of drinkable water, and provided irrigation and abundant food sources. So when the mighty Nile became red and putrid, making water undrinkable and killing the fish, God showed He was the one in charge of the Nile and not the false god Hapi. Associated with the mighty Nile and the god Hapi was the goddess *Heka*, (also Heket), the frog-headed deity, apparently later known as the Greek goddess Hecate of witchcraft and even Halloween. "As the dark goddess of witchcraft, Hecate, like Isis, was worshiped with impure rites and magical incantations. Her name was probably derived from the ancient Egyptian word Heka ("sorcery" or "magical"), which may explain her association with the Egyptian frog goddess of the same name. This may also explain the affiliation of frogs with witchcraft, and the various potions of frog-wart" (Thomas Horn, "The Halloween Goddess," *Raiders News Update*).

Since the frogs multiplied after the Nile overflowed, they symbolized fertility of the land, but when the Nile was low, few frogs appeared and were a sign of a coming scarcity. This is why the god Hapi was shown with a *frog* in its hand, depicting abundant water and good crops. When God told Moses to say to Pharaoh that He would smite Egypt with frogs, the Pharaoh was sure this deity, Heka, would prevent it. But when Aaron stretched his hand over the waters of Egypt, the whole nation was overrun with slimy frogs. Another Egyptian god was shown to be powerless and humiliated along with the Pharaoh. The next plague was of that of lice, gnats or mosquitoes, as the Hebrew translation can render it. This plague would have embarrassed the god Geb, the great god of the earth. The Egyptians gave

offerings to Geb for the bounty of the soil—yet it was from "the dust of the soil" that this plague originated. Another Egyptian god was shown to be powerless.

Now comes the *fourth plague*—huge swarms of flies appeared and probably included the blood-sucking gadfly and even the scarab beetles. These beetles had jaws that can saw through wood, and are worse than termites. This was an attack on Khephri, the scarab-headed god of beetles and flies, who was associated with life and rebirth. The Egyptian worship of the scarab comes from their belief that Khephri, in the form of a gigantic scarab, rolled the sun like a huge ball through the sky and the rolled it through the underworld to the eastern horizon. Each morning Khephri would renew the sun so that it could give life to all the world. But now, all of these flies attacked the Egyptians until the Pharaoh momentarily relented and permitted the Israelites to sacrifice to their God, but only inside Egypt. Moses refused this offer, and Pharaoh then offered to let them travel only a distance of three days. Then Moses prayed to God and the flies left, but Pharaoh went back on his word. "But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go" (Exodus 8:32).

So the *fifth plague* was directed against the valuable Egyptian livestock. Moses told Pharaoh: "Behold, the hand of the Lord will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep—a very severe pestilence. And the Lord will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt. So nothing shall die of all that belongs to the children of Israel" (9:3-4).

Egyptians had become so superstitious, that they worshipped the bull god Apis, thinking it was the incarnation of the god Ptah. He was also associated with Ra, from whom he borrowed the disk of the sun he wore between his horns. The Apis bull supposedly had the power of prophecy. When the Apis bull died the land of Egypt mourned as they would for the loss of a Pharaoh. After death, its body would be embalmed as if it was royalty. Along with Apis was Hathor, the cow-headed goddess of the desert. She was the symbolic mother of Pharaoh, and this plague would have been a direct insult to Khnum, the ram-god, and to Bast, the cat goddess of love. "So the Lord did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died, but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one died. Then Pharaoh sent, and indeed, not even one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go" (9:6-7).

The *sixth plague* was now directed at the Egyptians themselves, and their deity Imhotep, the god of medicine

and wisdom. God told Moses and Aaron: “Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and...it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt...and the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils” (9:8-11). This plague was probably skin anthrax, a black abscess that develops into boils and affects the knees, legs, and soles of the feet. It showed Imhotep, the god of medicine was powerless. Originally, he had been a great physician and architect of the first pyramids that later generations worshipped as a god. This plague would have also been an affront to Serapis, the deity in charge of healing, and Thoth, the ibis-headed god of intelligence and medical learning. Yet, despite this terrible plague, Pharaoh did not soften his heart.

So God poured out the *seventh plague*—a devastating hail and lightning all over Egypt. God said to Pharaoh, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. 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. As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now...And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground...and hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail” (9:13-26).

This hail would have been a very rare occurrence, for this region only receives about two inches of rain per year. Since this plague originated from the sky, it would have shown the sky goddess Nut to be powerless. She was supposed to be the mother of five other gods: Osiris, Hathor, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys. Isis and Seth supposedly protected the crops, but the devastated fields revealed their impotence. Pharaoh was so worried, he called for Moses and admitted: “I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the Lord, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer. So Moses said to him, ‘As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the

Lord’s. But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the Lord God” (9:27-30). Sure enough, once the hailstorm ceased, Pharaoh went back on his word.

So the *eighth plague* was unleashed—the terrible locust attack. God told Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord. So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory...and they shall eat the residue of what is left...and they shall fill your houses” (10:1-6).

Pharaoh initially relented, but when he learned all the Israelites were to go with all of their belongings and cattle, he denied their plea. So the locust came, “For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left” (10:15).

Locust are grasshoppers that under stress develop other instincts and become a ravenous army. The prophet Joel described their devastation: “What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” (Joel 1:4). This describes their four stages: the “hopper” stage without wings; the “jumper” stage when wings begin to develop; the “biter” stage; and the mature stage. Locust have regularly devastated areas around the world. One plague of locust destroyed parts of Africa between 1926 and 1942 nearly double the size of the United States. In 2002, the U.N. spent \$850,000 to combat the worst locust plague to hit Afghanistan for thirty years.

This plague humiliated *Anubis*, the god of the fields. Again Pharaoh called Moses and asked forgiveness, but when the plague left, he hardened his heart.

The *ninth plague* was a terrifying darkness. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt. So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings” (10:21-23). The plague of darkness was against the sun god Amon-Ra and insult to Egypt’s religion and entire culture. Amon and Ra were

originally two separate deities that were combined. He was represented with a man's body and the head of a falcon surmounted by a solar disk. Amon-Ra was believed to sail across the sky in a boat each day and under the world at night. But once again, this supposedly mighty god was powerless. Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, 'Go, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you'" (10:31). Moses insisted the cattle and the children would also go, and Pharaoh then refused, and said to Moses, "Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die. So Moses said, 'You have spoken well, I will never see your face again'" (10:24-29).

So God prepared the final plague—the death of all the firstborn of the Egyptians and their animals. He told with this plague Pharaoh would at last let them go. They were to request articles of silver and gold from the Egyptians that greatly feared Moses. Moses told the people that at midnight, God would strike down all the firstborn of humans and animals in Egypt, except for the Israelites and their animals. "But the Lord said to Moses, 'Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his hand'" (11:9-10).

This plague was directed against all the gods of Egypt, and in particular at Pharaoh, who was considered a god-king and the incarnation of Ra, the sun god and Osiris, the giver of life. All of them proved powerless.

For this last plague, God would leave a memorial, the Passover ceremony, that should be celebrated each year at the assigned date. He said: "This month shall be your beginning of months, it shall be *the first month* of the year to you...Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year...Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh *on that night*; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it...You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and *against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment*: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass

over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you *a memorial*; and you shall keep it as *a feast* to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by *an everlasting ordinance*" (12:5-14).

Here we have the original instructions to keep the Passover. It seems very clear from this account that the Passover should be kept at the *beginning* of the fourteenth day of the first month. The lamb was to be killed "at twilight," then the rest of the preparations were to be done that night of the fourteenth, the death angel would pass over that night, they were to remain in their homes until morning, then burn the remains of the sacrifice, quickly go spoil the Egyptians, mount up their goods, and assemble at a given point. They would all leave that following night, as Numbers 33:2 clearly says: "They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; *on the day after the Passover* the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians."

Notice the different feasts of God: "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread" (Leviticus 23:5-6).

Now *if* the Israelites ate the Passover at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> day, what good is the fourteenth day? Twilight means after sunset, when the day ends. Then we would have *two events* that overlap on the fifteenth day—the eating of the Passover and the leaving of Egypt. Clearly God is not the author of confusion. The account makes much more sense that the Israelites celebrated the Passover *at the beginning* of the fourteenth day, then the death angel came over Egypt that night, they burnt the leftovers in the morning, spoiled the Egyptians, hurriedly gathered at Rameses, and then left *the night of the fifteenth* and took their unleavened bread with them. The Bible said they left at night: "For in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of *Egypt by night*" (Deut. 16:1).

As the Fundamental Beliefs of our church says, "We believe in observing the New Testament Passover **on the night** of the 14th of Abib, the anniversary of the death of our Savior" (Lev. 23:5; Luke 22:13-14). Nevertheless, we do admit there is still controversy over the subject and it is fraught with difficulties. After examining different viewpoints, we conclude the *preponderance* of evidence supports keeping it at the start of the 14th.