

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Exodus

By Ken Miller

WEEK 4 READING



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God Knows Best

¹ But the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

² God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the Lord. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.’” ⁹ Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

¹⁰ So the Lord said to Moses, ¹¹ “Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” ¹² But Moses said to the Lord, “Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” ¹³ But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. – Exodus 6:1-13 ESV

Verse one appears to contain God’s immediate response to Moses’ little diatribe recorded in the closing verses of chapter five.

“O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.” – Exodus 5:22-23 ESV

After allowing Moses to vent his frustration, God simply stated, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land” (Exodus 6:1 NLT).

God feels no obligation to defend Himself to Moses. So, rather than answer His messenger’s accusations, God states His intentions. But this ESV translation seems to give Pharaoh a bit too much credit in the unfolding of God’s plan. At first glance, it appears as if Pharaoh is wielding all the power and authority. It will be Pharaoh’s strong hand that sends them out. It will be Pharaoh’s strong hand that drives them from his land. But the NET Bible translates this verse differently.

“Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for compelled by my strong hand he will release them, and by my strong hand he will drive them out of his land.” – Exodus 6:1 NET

Notice how this translation puts all the focus on God. It better conveys the idea of God’s sovereignty and Pharaoh’s role as an instrument in His all-powerful hands. While either translation could be used, the second makes more sense considering the context.

“The expression ‘with a strong hand’ (וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה, *uvyad khazaqah*) could refer (1) to God’s powerful intervention (‘compelled by my strong hand’) or (2) to Pharaoh’s forceful pursuit (‘he will forcefully drive them out’). In Exodus 3:20 God has summarized what his hand would do in Egypt, and that is probably what is intended here, as he promises that Moses will see what God will do.” – NET Bible Study Notes

It is likely that a time gap exists between verse one and verse two. It records another conversation between Moses and God that took place at a later date. In this encounter, God introduces Himself to Moses by a new name: Yahweh.

“I am Yahweh—‘the Lord.’ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty’—but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them. And I reaffirmed my covenant with them. Under its terms, I promised to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as foreigners.” – Exodus 6:2-4 NLT

Up to this point in the history of God’s people, God had revealed Himself by the name of El-Shaddai, which can be translated as “God Almighty.” When He spoke to the patriarch Abraham, God used this appellation to identify Himself.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty.’” – Genesis 17:1 NET

Now, centuries later, God was letting Moses know that He wanted to be referred to by a different name; a name Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had never used. When God appeared to Moses at the scene of the burning bush, He revealed His name as, “I AM who I am” (Exodus 3:14 NLT). Then He added, “Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14 NLT). But then God provided further clarification.

“Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

*This is my eternal name,
my name to remember for all generations.” – Exodus 3:15 NLT*

The Hebrew word that is translated as “I am” is *hāyâ*. It can mean “to be.” In a sense, God was telling Moses, “I am the One who is.” He is the always-existing or eternal one. And from *hāyâ*,

the name *Yahweh* was derived. This name speaks of God's self-existence and self-sufficiency. He is dependent upon no one and yet, everyone and everything is completely dependent upon Him.

In future generations, the scribes would hold the name of God in such high esteem that they refused to write it. Instead, they replaced it with the term, "the LORD." This would become the most common designation when transcribing the name *Yahweh* in Scripture. In this passage, God is letting His disgruntled messenger know that the self-existent Lord over all things was speaking to him. The same Yahweh who had established a covenant with Abraham and all his descendants was the one who was sovereignly ordaining every phase of Moses' assignment.

The same God who made the covenant with Abraham was getting ready to fulfill the covenant through Moses.

"I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant." – Exodus 6:5 ESV

God heard and God remembered. This doesn't suggest that God had somehow forgotten about His people. It simply means that He chose this point in time to fulfill the promises tied to His covenant with Abraham. Notice how many times God states, "I will."

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians..." – vs 6

"I will deliver you from slavery to them..." – vs 6

"I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment..." – vs 7

"I will take you to be my people..." – vs 7

"I will be your God..." – vs 7

"I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession..." – vs 8

God was not declaring his intentions or sharing He hoped to accomplish. He was assuring Moses that each of these things was guaranteed to take place because He had ordained them and would bring them to fruition. He would do what He had promised to do – down to the last detail.

God commanded Moses to deliver these incredible promises to the people, which he did, but they didn't receive them with open arms.

...they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. – Exodus 6:9 ESV

Faced with the prospect of making bricks without straw and having to endure increasingly more intense persecution from the Egyptians, the people of Israel viewed all this as little more than empty rhetoric. They had listened to Moses once and were not about to do it again. They were demoralized and devoid of hope. And all these lofty promises from Yahweh were of little use when there were brick quotas to meet and more harsh treatment to expect. What good were the promises of future deliverance and a land of their own if they were all going to die at the hands of the Egyptians?

Fully aware of the people's rejection of His promises, God ordered Moses to appear before Pharaoh again and reiterate his previous request.

"...let the people of Israel go out of his land." – Exodus 6:10 ESV

But Moses wasn't too excited about reliving that experience. After all, he explained, "If my own people won't listen to what I have to say, what hope do I have of persuading Pharaoh to change his mind?" He broke out his "I'm a lousy speaker" excuse in the hopes of convincing God to change His mind.

But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them orders for the Israelites and for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. – Exodus 6:13 NLT

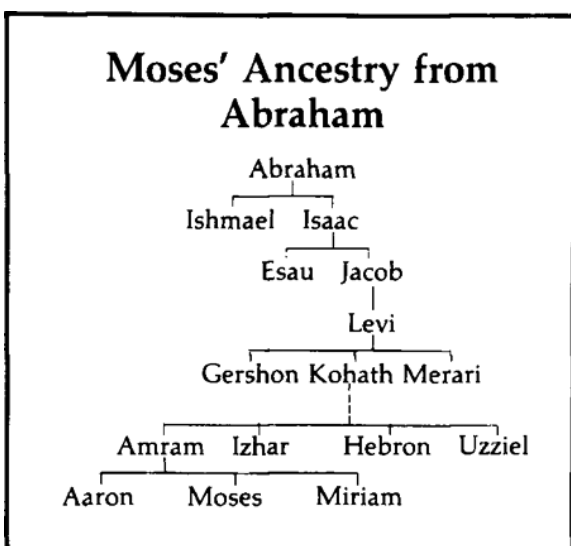
God wasn't accepting excuses or changing His mind. His plan was set in stone and His promises were guaranteed. While Moses may not have liked the way God's plan was unfolding, he would eventually learn that everything was happening according to God's sovereign will and according to God's perfect timeline.

God's Plan and Man's Plan

¹⁴ These are the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben. ¹⁵ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the clans of Simeon. ¹⁶ These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the years of the life of Levi being 137 years. ¹⁷ The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their clans. ¹⁸ The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years. ¹⁹ The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰ Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years. ²¹ The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²² The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³ Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴ The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the clans of the Korahites. ²⁵ Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their clans.

²⁶ These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: "Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts." ²⁷ It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.

²⁸ On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹ the Lord said to Moses, "I am the Lord; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." ³⁰ But Moses said to the Lord, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?" – Exodus 6:14-30 ESV



In the second half of Genesis 6, Moses includes his own genealogy. This listing of obscure and difficult-to-pronounce names seems out of place and unnecessary, but it provides the reader with validation of Moses' role as Israel's deliverer. In it, Moses traces his ancestry back to Levi, one of the 12 sons of Jacob, who himself was a grandson of Abraham. This direct line back to the patriarch of the Hebrew people provides an essential link to the covenant promises made to Abraham by God.

Not long after Abraham had arrived in the land of Canaan from Haran, God had made a covenant commitment to him. He promised to produce from Abraham a great nation. But there was one

problem; Moses was childless, and his wife was barren. And this apparent setback prompted Moses to ask God to accept Eliezer, his manservant, as his heir. But God had other plans.

“This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” – Genesis 15:4-5 ESV

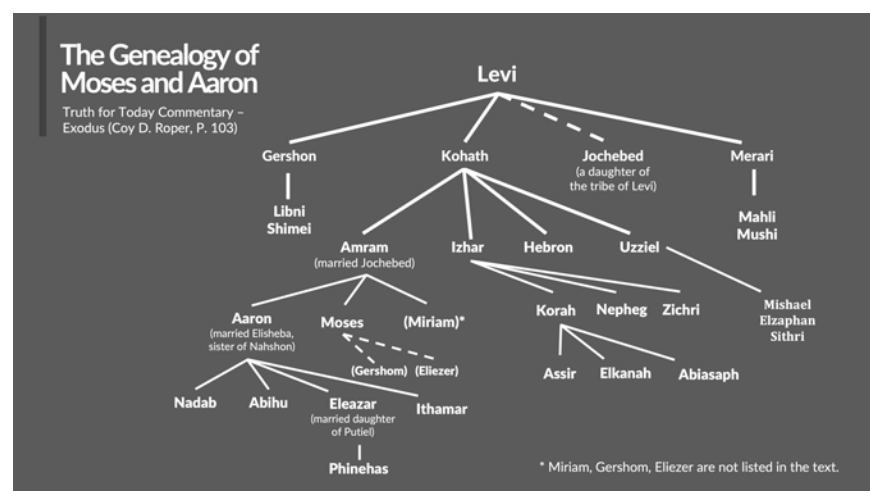
God was not going to accomplish His covenant promises through Eliezer. He would produce a long line of descendants through a son of Abraham who would be born through Sarah, the patriarch’s barren wife.

But this promise of a miraculous provision of a son and numberless descendants was accompanied by a rather dire prediction of future suffering.

“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. – Genesis 15:13 ESV

Abraham’s progeny would end up spending four centuries living in a foreign land where they would suffer great affliction and pain. In time, Abraham’s yet-to-be-born son, Isaac, would bear a son named Jacob, whose own 12 sons and their families would be forced to relocate to the land of Egypt in order to escape the devastating effects of a worldwide famine. Once there, their number would increase greatly and strike fear into the heart of the Pharaoh, causing him to institute a systematic program of persecution and extermination of the Hebrew people. But God promised Abraham that this period of suffering had an end date. There would be a time of great deliverance.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation...” – Genesis 15:14-16 ESV



And though, at the time, God did not reveal the nature of this deliverance, Moses provides the evidence that the long-awaited release from bondage would take place through another descendant of Abraham: Himself.

This book, like the other four books of the

Pentateuch, was written by Moses long after the events it records took place. Its content was originally intended for the benefit of the second generation of Israelites who were preparing to

enter Canaan, the land promised to them by God as their inheritance. These were the sons and daughters of the very people that Moses and Aaron were trying to convince to leave Egypt.

When Moses showed up in Egypt with a message declaring Yahweh's intentions to deliver His people out of bondage, he was originally met with eager excitement. But when he floated the idea by Pharaoh, he got a rather icy reception. The king of Egypt was unwilling to let the Israelites go, even for a few days. Instead, he intensified their workload and increased their suffering. And this unexpected reaction from Pharaoh caused the people of Israel to turn on Moses and his brother. Little did they know at the time, that Moses was a direct descendant of Abraham and God's chosen instrument of deliverance.

But this genealogical record, placed as it is rather awkwardly in the middle of the historical narrative, is meant to remind the reader that this entire episode is the work of God. Moses is not some arrogant, self-appointed savior who assigned himself the responsibility of delivering the people of Israel from bondage. He is God's preordained, hand-picked deliverer who just happens to be a descendant of Levi, one of the 12 sons of Jacob. His entire life story is a testimony to the sovereign hand of God. The author of the book of Hebrews reveals God's providential plan for this man's life and the role that faith played all along the way.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. – Hebrews 11:23-25 ESV

And Moses follows up his own family tree with the summary statement: "These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: 'Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.' It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron" (Exodus 6:26-27 ESV).

These men were destined for their roles. Their lives were the divinely ordained outcome of God's predetermined will and their arrival in Egypt was in direct fulfillment of God's sovereign plan. He had a job for them to do.

But when Moses and his brother were attempting to carry out the assignment God had given them, things were not looking up. Their impressive genealogical background was not providing them with confidence or assurance that their task was going to work. Being a legitimate descendant of Abraham was all well and good, but Pharaoh couldn't care less. And the people of Israel, suffering under the oppressive hand of this powerful despot, had a lot more to worry about than the genealogy of Moses. And, at the time, even Moses was less than impressed with his own pedigree. His good genes and stellar ancestral roots were proving to be of no use in his confrontations with Pharaoh.

"Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?" – Genesis 6:30 ESV

Moses was living out his greatest fear. He had warned God that he was a lousy speaker and had no business serving as a mouthpiece for the Almighty. His reference to “uncircumcised lips” was a rather clever way of claiming that his words were unacceptable and unworthy. The message may have been God’s, but it was coming out of the mouth of a man who was unworthy to speak on God’s behalf. At least, that was Moses’ take on it, and this is the second time he has used this excuse (Exodus 6:12).

But as the genealogy was meant to prove, God had not made a mistake. Moses had been born for this role and would be used by God to accomplish His sovereign will for the descendants of Israel. One of Abraham’s offspring would become the designated savior who would redeem God’s people from slavery and lead them to freedom. But that role would not be easy and those whose lives he had come to deliver would prove to be less than receptive to his message. But, in time, God would harden the heart of Pharaoh and soften the hearts of His chosen people. His will would be done, and His deliverer would be successful. All in God’s own time.

God's Octogenarian Tag Team

¹ And the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ² You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. ³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ⁴ Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. ⁵ The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." ⁶ Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the Lord commanded them. ⁷ Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹ "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'" ¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. ¹² For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³ Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. – Exodus 7:1-13 ESV

When God first commissioned Moses for his new role as the deliverer of the people of Israel, Moses tried to use his lack of speaking skills as an excuse for turning down the position. But God responded by adding Aaron, Moses' older brother, to the team. The two of them would become the perfect pair, with Moses serving as the silent, but highly powerful partner and Aaron performing the role of spokesman. God described their partnership this way:

"You shall speak to him [Aaron] and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs." – Exodus 4:15-17 ESV

Moses would be responsible for passing on to Aaron any messages he received from the Lord, then Aaron would vocalize God's words to the appropriate party. But all signs and wonders would be Moses' purview. With his staff in hand, he would enact any and all miracles ordered by God to validate the message and the messengers. Even before Moses left Midian, God told him, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go" (Exodus 4:21 ESV).

Upon their arrival in Egypt, Moses and his brother had run into an apparent roadblock in their efforts to deliver the people of Israel. Things had started out well when the Hebrews had received the two men and their message with open arms. But Pharaoh had proved to be a hard nut to crack, rejecting their request to allow the Israelites to go into the wilderness to worship

their God. And Pharaoh subsidized his rejection by increasing the workload of the Hebrews, whom he viewed as little more than captive immigrant workers. With their hopes dashed and their daily lives marked by suffering and pain, the Israelites lashed out at Moses and Aaron, blaming them for their circumstances. This led Moses to take out his frustration on God.

“O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.” – Exodus 5:22-23 ESV

But none of this should have come as a shock to Moses. God had warned him that Pharaoh would not be cooperative. What is interesting to note is that words were never going to be the means by which God accomplished His will in Egypt. Pharaoh was never going to be coerced or convinced by words alone. And while Moses had been worrying about his lack of rhetorical skills, he should have listened to what God had said.

“When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’” – Exodus 4:21-23 ESV

The miracles would be the means by which God orchestrated the release of His people. And God told Moses that one particular miracle would prove to be the deciding factor in persuading Pharaoh to let God’s people go.

As chapter seven opens, the roles of Aaron and Moses remain the same. Aaron will continue to act as the mouthpiece for the pair, while Moses performs all the signs. But God informs them that even all the signs and wonders Moses displays before Pharaoh will do nothing to change his mind.

“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.” – Exodus 7:3-4 ESV

In a sense, God is letting Moses know that the initial signs he performs will appear as little more than cheap parlor tricks to Pharaoh. He will be impressed but not enough to change his mind. And as this chapter reveals, the magicians of Egypt will replicate many of the signs that Moses performs, further negating their influence. But God told Moses that another set of signs and wonders was coming.

“Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.” – Exodus 7:4-5 ESV

These “great acts of judgment” were going to take things to a whole new level. And God wanted His two messengers to know that the simple, yet impressive signs He had instructed Moses to perform were just the beginning. There was far more to come.

But God instructed them to go before Pharaoh and do just as He had commanded them to do. Pharaoh was going to demand that they provide some kind of sign to prove that they were truly representatives of the Hebrews’ deity.

“When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’” – Exodus 7:9 ESV

In this instance, it would be Aaron who did double duty, speaking to Pharaoh but also performing the sign from God. When they appeared before Pharaoh, he demanded a sign just as God had predicted, and Aaron did as God commanded. He threw his staff to the ground and it became a snake. But Aaron and Moses must have been shocked when the Egyptian magicians quickly replicated the sign by turning their own staffs into snakes. The text provides no explanation for how the magicians managed to do what they did. But there are only a few options available. Either these men did what they did by the power of Satan or God did it. The second choice makes the most sense. Since the staff of Aaron possessed no power in and of itself, it had to be God who made this miraculous transformation possible. The sign was His idea. So, when the magicians threw down their staffs, God displayed His power yet again, and the magicians were probably amazed by what they saw. It is likely that they never expected their efforts to be successful. But the real demonstration of God’s power was in what happened next.

But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. – Exodus 7:12 ESV

This powerful demonstration of God’s power would have validated Aaron as His spokesman. God was the one who turned all the staffs into snakes and He was the one who gave Aaron’s staff primacy over all the others. God was declaring Aaron and Moses to be His official representatives. But Pharaoh remained unimpressed and unwavering in his commitment to deny the Israelites their freedom.

Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. – Exodus 7:13 ESV

Now the stage was set. Pharaoh knew he was dealing with two men who had true power. Yet, he remained just as fervent in his desire to keep the Israelites in their role as free slave labor. He was not about to give up this valuable asset, even when faced with Aaron’s display of magical power. It was going to take a lot more than that to change his heart and God knew it. Not only that, God had ordained it.

But as this scene in the royal palace comes to a close, it is essential that we not gloss over the small detail that Moses discloses in the narrative.

Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh. – Exodus 7:7 ESV

As the old adage states, these two men were not spring chickens. They would be considered old in just about any cultural context, but in that day and age, they would have been ancient. Moses spent 40 years of his life in Pharaoh's court before fleeing to Midian. There, he lived another 40 years in relative obscurity and anonymity. And at the ripe old age of 80, God called Moses to serve as the deliverer of His people. This octogenarian was destined to be the God-ordained savior of the Israelite people. He had been for this role and God had planned for his starting date to begin at age 80.

"D. L. Moody wittily said that Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh's court thinking he was somebody; forty years in the desert learning he was nobody; and forty years showing what God can do with somebody who found out he was nobody." – Bernard Ramm, *His Way Out*

I can't help but think of the movie, "Grumpy Old Men," starring Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. It is difficult not to see Moses and Aaron as two crusty old senior citizens with bad backs, diminished hearing, and poor eyesight. When they should have been playing canasta in the old folks' home, they were serving as God's emissaries in the court of Pharaoh. They would not have been impressive to look at. Their presence would not have struck fear into Pharaoh. But these two unlikely candidates had been chosen by God to carry out His sovereign plan for delivering His people. And, with His help, they would prove more than adequate for the task.

Plague Number 1

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.

¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ And 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 so far, you have not obeyed. ¹⁷ Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. ¹⁸ The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.'"¹⁹ And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. ²¹ And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. ²² But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. ²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

²⁵ Seven full days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile. – Exodus 7:14-25 ESV

Things were about to get busy for God's two elderly representatives. At an age when most men would be slowing down, Moses and Aaron had been assigned the God-ordained task of delivering His people from their captivity in Egypt. And this formidable responsibility wasn't made any easier by the recalcitrant Pharaoh. As God had warned, the king of Egypt would do everything in his considerable power to keep the Israelites enslaved.

God was not surprised by Pharaoh's actions. He had actually predicted it and claimed that He was the motivating factor behind Pharaoh's stubborn resistance. The Almighty knew the king's heart and was using his predispositions and natural tendencies to bring about the preordained plan for Israel's exodus from Egypt. Pharaoh's "hard heart" would play a major role in God's redemptive plan.

Having enacted their first sign in the presence of Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron were given instructions to take things to the next level. Aaron's staff turning into a snake was a mere parlor trick compared to what God was about to do. Pharaoh's arrogant refusal to accept the terms of God's demands would be met with severe judgment. God was going to strike at the heart of Egypt's economic, religious, and cultural life: The Nile.

This vast river was the source of all life for the people of Egypt. Its annual flood cycle ensured the dissemination of nutrient-rich silt on the shorelines, providing fertility and prosperity to the land. The Egyptians believed the Nile to be a gift of the gods and they associated a number of their deities with the river itself.

There were Apis and Isis, the god and goddess of the Nile. Khnum was considered the guardian of the Nile. There were at least two gods who were deemed responsible for the Nile's flooding. The first was the crocodile-like deity Sobek, whose domain consisted of the Nile's waters. The second was Hapi, who was sometimes referred to as "Lord of the River Bringing Vegetation." Because of his role in the annual flood cycle, Hapi was also considered a god of fertility.

It makes perfect sense that God would choose this revered natural resource to be the site of His first judgment. He sent Moses and Aaron to meet Pharaoh on the banks of the river the next morning. The omniscient God of Israel foreknew that Pharaoh would be making a morning visit to the river's banks and He instructed His two agents to get there early and be ready to confront the king upon his arrival.

Moses was instructed to have Aaron take the same staff that God had transformed into a snake and use it to strike the waters of the Nile. But before doing so, Moses was to deliver to Pharaoh the following short speech from God.

So this is what the Lord says: "I will show you that I am the Lord." Look! I will strike the water of the Nile with this staff in my hand, and the river will turn to blood. The fish in it will die, and the river will stink. The Egyptians will not be able to drink any water from the Nile.'" – Exodus 7:17-18 NLT

It is likely that Pharaoh was accompanied by a royal retinue of armed guards, servants, and administrative officials. Perhaps his visit had religious overtones and there were priests to assist him in making sacrifices to one or more of the gods of the Nile.

But at the sight of these two elderly Hebrews standing on the bank of the river, Pharaoh must have been more than a bit surprised and irritated. And to hear them pronounce their far-fetched plan to turn the river to blood must have left him bemused. Who did these men think they were? Did they not know they were dealing with one of the most powerful men in the world?

But Moses and Aaron did as God had instructed them.

As Pharaoh and all of his officials watched, Aaron raised his staff and struck the water of the Nile. Suddenly, the whole river turned to blood! The fish in the river died, and the water became so foul that the Egyptians couldn't drink it. There was blood everywhere throughout the land of Egypt. – Exodus 7:20-21 NLT



In a matter of minutes, the entire river had been transformed into blood. This supernatural display of God's power was meant to demonstrate His superiority and sovereignty. The God of creation was giving irrefutable evidence of His status as the one true God. Hapi, Khnum,

Apis, and Isis were all defenseless before the majesty and might of Jehovah. They could not protect their own domain from the devastating judgment of the God of the Hebrews. And all Pharaoh could do was stand back and watch.

According to the text, the effects of this miracle were not localized but widespread throughout Egypt, impacting "all its rivers, canals, ponds, and all the reservoirs" (Exodus 7:19 NLT). Every source of drinking water was affected. And, not only that, the fish that served as a primary source of food for the Egyptians were wiped out as a result of this nationwide catastrophe.

In what will become a rather strange and repeated scene, Pharaoh's magicians responded to this devastating display of God's judgment by replicating it. In other words, they mimicked the actions of God and actually made matters worse. If they had the power to turn water into blood, why did they not choose to do the opposite? Once again, God seems to be using these so-called magicians as instruments of His sovereign will. It is ironic that they display similar power to that of Moses and Aaron, but they cannot repair or resist what God's agents have done. They can only replicate it and increase the suffering of their own people.

Seven days would pass. During that time, Pharaoh would go about his business as if nothing had happened. He refused to think about the devastation brought upon his nation by the God of Moses and Aaron. Safely ensconced in his palace, he was unaware that his people were busy digging wells in a vain attempt to find fresh drinking water. And little did Pharaoh know that this was just the beginning. The book of Psalms records the litany of miraculous judgments that were headed Pharaoh's way.

*They did not remember his power
or the day when he redeemed them from the foe,
when he performed his signs in Egypt
and his marvels in the fields of Zoan.
He turned their rivers to blood,
so that they could not drink of their streams.
He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them,
and frogs, which destroyed them.*

*He gave their crops to the destroying locust
and the fruit of their labor to the locust.
He destroyed their vines with hail
and their sycamores with frost.
He gave over their cattle to the hail
and their flocks to thunderbolts.
He let loose on them his burning anger,
wrath, indignation, and distress,
a company of destroying angels.
He made a path for his anger;
he did not spare them from death,
but gave their lives over to the plague.
He struck down every firstborn in Egypt,
the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham.
Then he led out his people like sheep
and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. – Psalm 78:42-52 ESV*

The blood-filled Nile was only the precursor to so much more that God had planned for the nation of Egypt. And when He was done, they would know that He alone was Lord.

Plague Number 2

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in 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 plague all your country with frogs. ³ The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. ⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.'"" ⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals 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 But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

⁸ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." ⁹ Moses said to Pharaoh, "Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile."

¹⁰ And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God. ¹¹ The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile." ¹² So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the Lord about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh.

¹³ And the Lord did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. ¹⁴ And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.

¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. – Exodus 8:1-15 ESV

Seven days after having turned all the potable water in Egypt to blood, God summoned Moses and Aaron again. They were to return to the palace and reiterate their request for Pharaoh to release the people of Israel. But this time, their petition was to be accompanied by a warning of a second plague. Having gotten Pharaoh's attention with the blood-filled Nile and the mass extinction of most of its aquatic life, Moses and Aaron were to issue a threat of further devastation should he refuse their request again.

"This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will send a plague of frogs across your entire land. The Nile River will swarm with frogs. They will come up out of the river and into your palace, even into your bedroom and onto your bed! They will enter the houses of your officials and your people. They will even jump into your ovens and your kneading bowls. Frogs will jump on you, your people, and all your officials." – Exodus 8:1-4 NLT



This time, rather than turning water into blood, the plague would feature a supernatural infestation of frogs. As a good Egyptian, Pharaoh would have understood the irony in this warning because his people held these amphibious creatures in high esteem. They even had a goddess, Heqet, whose image reflected that of a frog. This grotesque-looking deity was believed to be the wife of Khnum, the creator god. This husband-wife team of gods was responsible for bringing life to every human being. Khnum would fashion them on his potter's wheel, then Heqet would provide them with life before placing them in the mother's womb.

Many pregnant women wore charms or amulets featuring Heqet's image, as a kind of talisman to ensure the safe delivery of their child. Frogs were a protected species in Egypt and the intentional killing of them was punishable by death.



So, when Moses announced to Pharaoh that these esteemed creatures were going to suddenly explode in number and fill the land, it was to be a not-so-subtle message concerning the Egyptians' pantheon of mythical gods and goddesses. It would be as if Heqet, the goddess of fertility, was so good at her job that the creature whose image she bore would proliferate so successfully that they filled the land.

Little Heqets would be everywhere; in their homes and even in the royal palace. These symbols of fertility would show up in their bedrooms and even find their way into the beds of the Egyptians. No place would be free from their pervasive and repugnant presence.

What should not be overlooked is that these creatures came from the very Nile and other water sources that had been turned to blood. While the fish had died, the frogs had survived and thrived. There is no natural explanation for this phenomenon. It was intended to be a supernatural display of God's power and sovereignty. In a sense, God was bringing life from death. The bloody Nile was producing a superabundance of frogs, the very symbols of fertility and life for the Egyptian people. But this divine infestation would prove to be far less than pleasurable. The sheer numbers of these slimy creatures would soon leave the Egyptians with a sense of revulsion and a collective desire to see them eradicated.

But, as before, Pharaoh's magicians were unable to do anything about this latest sign. All they could do was replicate it. In other words, they made the problem worse. And their ability to mirror the actions of Moses and Aaron was likely a sovereign act of God. He allowed them to make more frogs but prevented them from doing anything to reduce their number or stop their proliferation.

One of the things that stands out in this scene is the way God utilized His two servants. There was a hierarchy of leadership in their relationship with Yahweh. Moses would receive instructions from God, then he would deliver them to Aaron.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him..." – Exodus 8:1 ESV

And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff...' – Exodus 8:5 ESV

Aaron was destined to be the primary enactor of God's will. He was the one who was ordered to throw down his staff in the presence of Pharaoh, and it was his staff that was turned into a serpent. It was also Aaron whom God ordered to turn the water into blood.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood...' – Exodus 7:19 ESV

This was all in fulfillment of God's statement: "he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him" (Exodus 4:16 ESV). The working relationship between these two brothers was divinely established. God had ordained that Moses would portray the role of God's primary emissary. He would then delegate responsibility to Aaron to carry out the will of Yahweh. So that when all was said and done, Pharaoh would know that these supernatural signs and wonders were the actions of the God of Moses and Aaron.

"So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go." – Exodus 3:20 ESV

And this hierarchy of leadership did not escape Pharaoh. When he and his people grew weary of the plague of frogs, he appealed to Moses and Aaron but addressed his request to their God.

"Plead with the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people. I will let your people go, so they can offer sacrifices to the Lord." – Exodus 8:8 ESV

He recognized that this was the work of a powerful deity and not some kind of parlor trick performed by an elderly Hebrew man. Pharaoh knew he was up against something far greater than he had ever seen before, and he was ready to acquiesce to God's demands.

Rather than providing Pharaoh with an immediate response to his request, Moses asked him to determine the timing of what would prove to be another miracle.

“You set the time!” Moses replied. “Tell me when you want me to pray for you, your officials, and your people. Then you and your houses will be rid of the frogs. They will remain only in the Nile River.” – Exodus 8:9 NLT

By allowing Pharaoh to choose the exact moment for God to act, Moses was demonstrating his own intimate relationship with Yahweh. Unlike Pharaoh, Moses could approach his God and have his requests heard and answered. And when Pharaoh set the following morning as the deadline for deliverance, Moses agreed with the request but warned Pharaoh “it will be as you have said. Then you will know that there is no one like the Lord our God” (Exodus 8:10 ESV). The God of the Hebrews had brought the frogs into being and He would be the one to make them disappear.

Moses took the request to God and, according to Pharaoh’s timelines, the next morning the frogs began to die off, leaving a massive clean-up effort for the Egyptians. But this miraculous display of God’s power did nothing to change the heart of Pharaoh. As soon as the frogs began to disappear, Pharaoh’s penchant for stubbornness reared its ugly head again.

...when Pharaoh saw that relief had come, he became stubborn. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted. – Exodus 8:15 NLT

God was not done, so Pharaoh was not ready to give in. It was going to take far more than blood and frogs to convince this arrogant despot to bend the knee to the will of God. And God had already preordained an entire series of plagues that would culminate in one final devastating display of His divine sovereignty.

“When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’” – Exodus 4:21-23 ESV

Pharaoh did not yet comprehend the full glory and magnitude of Yahweh. But, in time, he would. In time he would come to understand that there is no other god but the Lord. But for now, he was determined to remain stubbornly opposed to God’s will and destined to subject his people to the full weight of God’s divine wrath.

Plague Number 3

¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'" ¹⁷ And they did so. 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 in all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce 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 would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. – Exodus 8:16-19 ESV

God was not done. The water of the Nile had been turned to blood and then from this putrid source had come millions, if not billions, of frogs that filled every nook and cranny of Egypt. They were everywhere and in everything. But at Pharaoh's request, the frogs were miraculously eliminated, dying on the spot and leaving the Egyptians with a huge environmental clean-up operation to conduct.

And it seems that about the time the dead and decaying bodies of the frogs were removed, another divine judgment was waiting in the wings. Once again, God gave His instructions to Moses, who then passed them on to Aaron.

"Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'" – Exodus 8:16 ESV

While the blood-filled Nile posed a problem for the Egyptians, it was only seven days in duration. Soon, the fresh water returned, and the people were able to slake their thirst. And the epidemic of frogs lasted for a short period of time and then completely dissipated with their mass extinction.

But what happened next was something different altogether. This plague took things to a personal level. Rather than being inconvenienced by contaminated water or the uncomfortable presence of hideous frogs, the Egyptians were going to experience real pain. God was sending a horde of insects to make their lives miserable.

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 in all the land of Egypt. – Exodus 8:17 ESV



The Hebrew word that in English appears as “gnats” is כְּנִיּוֹם (*kinnim*), and it has been translated a variety of different ways, including as “lice, gnats, ticks, flies, fleas, or mosquitoes.” It is unclear exactly what kind of insect is being described, but it seems clear that, whatever they were, they were prolific and painful. Their comparison to dust suggests that they were both small in size and staggering in terms of their number. *The New*

Living Translation states that they “infested the entire land, covering the Egyptians and their animals” (Exodus 8:17 NLT). And would appear that these tiny creatures were more than a nuisance. They were actually painful, delivering either a bite or sting that made the lives of the Egyptians and their livestock miserable.

“They were ‘ . . . a species of gnats, so small as to be hardly visible to the eye, but with a sting which, according to Philo and Origin, causes a most painful irritation of the skin. They even creep into the eyes and nose, and after the harvest they rise in great swarms from the inundated rice fields.’” – C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*

These creatures were invasive and pervasive, and they were indiscriminate in terms of their attack. The rich and poor suffered alike. Pharaoh himself was not immune from their presence and he could do nothing to escape the frustrating nature of their relentless torment.

It seems readily apparent that their vast number was meant as a not-so-subtle reminder of the Israelites’ prolific explosion in during their time in Egypt. The opening chapter of the book established the staggering growth of Israel’s population while they were living in the land of Goshen.

*...they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and **filled the land**.* – Exodus 1:7 NLT

As with the Israelites, so with the gnats. They filled the land and proved to be a threat to the Egyptians’ way of life. And, as before, Pharaoh’s magicians attempted to replicate this supernatural sign by trying to conjure up even more gnats.

Pharaoh’s magicians tried to do the same thing with their secret arts, but this time they failed. And the gnats covered everyone, people and animals alike. – Exodus 8:8 NLT

The irony in this should not be missed. These men had also been able to turn water into blood and produce their own swarm of frogs. But this time, they were completely incapable of making more gnats. It seems odd that they would even try, but they were desperate to do anything to bring into question the power of Moses and Aaron.

It is almost as if God was letting them know that when it comes divine to judgment, He needed no help. He was fully capable of making more than enough gnats to accomplish His divine purpose. Stymied in their attempt to duplicate Aaron's sign, they turned to Pharaoh and confessed, "This is the finger of God!" (Exodus 8:19 NLT).

"They knew they were beaten and by whom. The reason for their choice of the word "finger" has occasioned many theories, none of which is entirely satisfying. At the least their statement highlights that the plague was accomplished by God with majestic ease and effortlessness. Perhaps the reason that they could not do this was that it involved producing life—from the dust of the ground, as in Genesis 2:7. The creative power of God confounded the magic of the Egyptians and brought on them a loathsome plague." – *NET Bible Study Notes on Exodus*

It was clear to these men that this sign had been the work of an unknown God. They use the generic term, *ēlōhîm*, and not the proper name, Jehovah. In doing so, they were not acknowledging the God of Israel, but were simply admitting that a divine being had been behind this devastating judgment. And no matter how hard they tried, they could not reproduce the works of Aaron, a "magician" of this unnamed God.

But their words made no impact on Pharaoh. As he has done so many times before, he hardened his heart against this latest display of God's power and judgment. He was not going to let these two elderly Jewish men change his mind or alter his plans for the people of Israel. In a sense, Pharaoh was saying, "Bring it on!" He was drawing a line in the sand and declaring his intention to refute any and all overtures from this invisible and overly demanding deity. Come what may, Pharaoh was going to stand his ground against Moses and Aaron's God.

Plague Number 4

²⁰ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. ²¹ Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. ²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. ²³ Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.'"" ²⁴ And the Lord did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

²⁵ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." ²⁶ But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²⁷ We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he tells us." ²⁸ So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you must not go very far away. Plead for me." ²⁹ Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." ³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. ³¹ And the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. ³² But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go. – Exodus 8:20-32 ESV

As a result of Pharaoh's stubbornness, the Egyptians have already had to endure rivers of blood, the stink of dead and rotting fish, an infestation of frogs, and the frustration of billions of irritating gnats. With each judgment, God increased the intensity of the suffering and pain, but Pharaoh remained unwaveringly committed to resisting the demands of Moses and the will of his God. He was not going to give in. Even when his magicians confessed to him that this latest affliction was "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19 ESV), Pharaoh continued to dig in his heels like a spoiled toddler.

But Pharaoh's heart remained hard. He wouldn't listen to them, just as the Lord had predicted. – Exodus 8:19 NLT

Everything was going according to God's preordained plan. Each of these devastating displays of God's power was intended to demonstrate His status as Lord and the one true God. And it should not be overlooked that these signs were all direct attacks on the false gods of the Egyptians.



The Egyptians had a plethora of deities, most of whom were tied directly to the natural world. Many of their gods were displayed with animal features used to illustrate their particular power or area of domain. Egyptian deities, even those that featured human heads, often had animal-like characteristics. It was not uncommon for these hybrid images to appear on statues and in the hieroglyphics that adorned the walls of their palaces and burial places. Virtually every animal indigenous to Egypt was linked to one or more of their gods. And their deification of the animal and insect kingdom is in keeping with the assessment of fallen humanity that Paul gives in his letter to the Romans.

They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! – Romans 1:25 NLT

Even the lowly fly was afforded god-like status in Egypt.

“Even the humble fly (called *aff* in Egyptian) was worn as a homopoeic amulet. Fly amulets were distinctly v-shaped, emphasizing the head and wings of the insect. They varied in size but most were 2cm or smaller and could be strung on a single necklace or bracelet, often interspaced by beads. Small fly amulets have been found in Egypt made from gold, silver, bone, lapis lazuli, faience, carnelian, and amethyst. Wearing a fly amulet was probably believed to protect the wearer from insect bites or ward off pesky flying creatures through apotropaic magic.” – <http://www.nilescribes.org>

The Hebrew word translated as “flies” is *‘ārōḇ*, and it literally means “swarm.” It could refer to any of a number of swarming insects, including flies and mosquitos. But whatever it was, it was larger in size than a gnat and far more vicious in its attacks. The book of Psalms contains a description of these flying insects that reveals that they were far more than just a nuisance.

He sent swarms of biting insects against them, as well as frogs that overran their land. – Psalm 78:45 NET

From stinging gnats to biting flies, the Egyptians were getting no rest from God’s judgment. And no amulet with the image of an insect was going to immunize the Egyptians against the wrath of God. Their magic was no match for Jehovah. But that didn’t phase the recalcitrant king of Egypt.

So, God ordered Moses to deliver a “stinging” message of His own to Pharaoh.

“Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse, then I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, your people, and all the houses. The Egyptian homes will be filled with flies, and the ground will be covered with them.” – Exodus 8:21 NLT

But this time, God added a rather novel addendum to His warning of pending judgment. When the flies came, they would somehow avoid the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel lived. In other words, God was going to supernaturally protect His own people. No amulets or good luck charms would be necessary.

“...this time I will spare the region of Goshen, where my people live. No flies will be found there. Then you will know that I am the Lord and that I am present even in the heart of your land.” – Exodus 8:22 NLT

God Almighty was going to put a hedge of protection around His children so that the flies would only affect the people of Egypt. Even the flocks and herds of the Israelites would be supernaturally spared when this judgment came upon the land of Egypt. And God lets Pharaoh know that this seemingly impossible dome of protection around Goshen will prove that He is not some regional deity relegated to the land of Canaan. No, He insists, “you will know that I am the Lord and that I am present even in the heart of your land” (Exodus 8:22 NLT). In a sense, God is stating that He will be the protector of His people. His presence will provide all the immunization they need from the coming judgment. And this miraculous display of divine differentiation between one group and another was meant to be a powerful reminder to the people of Israel that they belonged to God, and He was more than capable of caring for them.

And God delivered on His word.

“A thick swarm of flies filled Pharaoh’s palace and the houses of his officials. The whole land of Egypt was thrown into chaos by the flies.” – Exodus 8:24 NLT



Notice that God did this. There is no indication that either Aaron or Moses did anything to bring about this plague. No staff was raised. No words were spoken. Moses simply states, “And the Lord did so” (Exodus 8:24 ESV). This was all the handiwork of God. No help or

assistance was necessary. Moses and Aaron simply stood back and watched as God did His thing.

And God’s actions brought about apparent results. Pharaoh finally gave in and gave his permission for the Israelites to offer sacrifices to their God, but with one caveat. They had to do so within the land of Egypt. He forbade them to cross the border.

But Moses rejected Pharaoh’s last-minute revision to the plan.

“That wouldn’t be right. The Egyptians detest the sacrifices that we offer to the Lord our God. Look, if we offer our sacrifices here where the Egyptians can see us, they will stone us. We must take a three-day trip into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, just as he has commanded us.” – Exodus 8:26-27 NLT

Under great duress, Pharaoh finally caved into Moses’ demands, allowing them to make the 3-day journey into the wilderness to worship their God. But he insisted that they hurry and that they offer up a prayer for him before they go. Moses agreed to the terms and promised to bring the plight of Pharaoh and his Egyptians to the attention of God. Yet he warned him not to renege on his agreement.

“As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the Lord, and tomorrow the swarms of flies will disappear from you and your officials and all your people. But I am warning you, Pharaoh, don’t lie to us again and refuse to let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.” – Exodus 8:29 NLT

And Moses kept his end of the bargain. Immediately after leaving the palace, he prayed and, within minutes, God removed every last fly from the land. It was yet another supernatural display of God’s power and authority. Yet while the people of Egypt must have breathed a sigh of relief when the flies finally disappeared, Pharaoh sank back into his dark and defiant black hole of arrogant intransigence.

But Pharaoh again became stubborn and refused to let the people go. – Exodus 8:32 NLT

Plague Number 5

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say 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 still hold them, ³ behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴ But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.'"" ⁵ And the Lord set a time, saying, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land." ⁶ And the next day the Lord did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. ⁷ And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go. – Exodus 9:1-7 ESV

Moses prayed and God removed all the flies from the land. But Pharaoh remained unmoved by the Hebrew God's gracious and miraculous act. While he had pleaded with Moses to intercede with God on his behalf, the divine deliverance failed to soften his hardened heart.

"...the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained. But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go. – Exodus 8:21-32 NLT

So, God sent Moses and Aaron back to the palace with instructions to restate their request one more time.

"This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so they can worship me." – Exodus 9:1 NLT

The same God who had turned the water of the Nile into blood, produced an infestation of frogs and overwhelmed the land with gnats and flies, was still demanding that Pharaoh release the Hebrew people. And God reiterated the one-of-a-kind relationship the Israelites shared with Him. They were His people. They belonged to Yahweh.

This was a battle of sovereignty and ownership. Pharaoh believed the Hebrews belonged to him. He viewed them as little more than squatters and illegal aliens who had been living off the fruitfulness of the land for too long. They didn't belong in Egypt, but if they were going to stay, they were going to have to pay their way. That's why he turned them into a source of free labor and demanded that they do something to earn their keep.

But God wanted Pharaoh to know that the Hebrews were not his personal property to do with as he wished. They were the sons and daughters of God and, as such, were obligated to worship Him as their Heavenly Father. But to Pharaoh, this so-called God of Israel was just one more god in a long line of powerful and equally influential deities. And as before, God determined to prove His transcendence and unparalleled uniqueness by launching a direct assault on the gods of the Egyptians. In this case, He took aim at the Egyptian gods whose visible forms resembled

those of bulls, cows, and rams. More resistance from Pharaoh would result in additional judgment from God. And, once again, it would become clear that the false gods of Egypt were no match for Yahweh, the all-powerful God of Israel.

God didn't mince words or leave anything up to Pharaoh's imagination. He provided Moses with a very clear description of what was going to happen.

"If you continue to hold them and refuse to let them go, the hand of the Lord will strike all your livestock—your horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, sheep, and goats—with a deadly plague." – Exodus 9:2-3 NLT

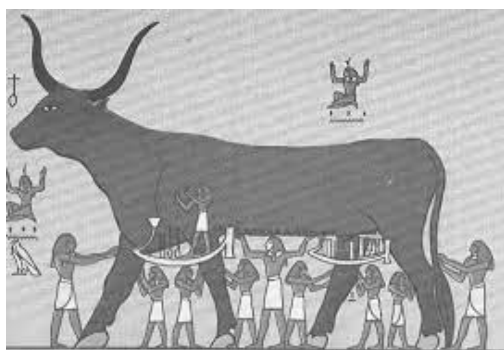
Every domesticated animal that the Egyptians depended upon for food, milk, transportation, labor, and clothing was going to be wiped out in a nationwide plague. And many of these animals, like bulls, cows, and rams were worshiped by the Egyptians as representations of their various gods.



Apis was a popular deity that was shown in the visage of a bull. Worship of the Apis bull is recorded as early as the First Dynasty (c. 3150 – c. 2890 BCE). It is believed that Apis was one of the first gods of the Egyptians and among the first animals associated with divinity and eternity. Over time, the Egyptians would use the image of the bull to represent other deities. Apis was originally worshiped as the god of fertility but later came to be associated with the god, Ptah. At one point, Apis was claimed to be the son of the god, Hathor, and was believed to be the divine source of all goodness and bounty.



Another one of the Egyptian gods was Amon-Re, whose form resembled that of a ram. This particular god was closely linked to the political well-being of Egypt. And it is interesting to note that there was a time when this god was simply known as Amon, but he was part of a "trinity" of gods that included Ptah and Re. Together, they formed a single god, of which Amon, Ptah, and Re were manifestations.



born again the next day.

Another god of the Egyptians was Nut, who was often depicted as a nursing cow. The ancient Egyptians believed Nut to be a celestial god, whose eyes were represented by the sun and moon, and whose role was tied to creation and new birth. She was considered the mother of all creation and the mother of Ra, the sun god. The Egyptians believed that Ra "birthed" each new day by passing through Nut's body. At the close of each day, Ra would reenter the womb of Nut, only to be

In considering the significance of these three animal/gods in the Egyptian religious taxonomy, it becomes apparent that they were held in high esteem. This made the animals whose visages they shared equally important to the Egyptians. So, when God announced that He was about to strike all the livestock, herds, and flocks of Egypt with a deadly disease, it would have had spiritual as well as physical ramifications. Not only was the livelihood of the Egyptians going to be affected, but an important segment of their religious belief system was going to come under direct attack by the God of Israel.

This time, the plague would be far more than a nuisance. It would be deadly and devastating to the Egyptian economy. We're talking about the complete elimination of all their horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. And to add salt to the wound, God announces that the livestock, herds, and flocks of the Israelites will be spared. The land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, would be designated a death-free zone.

But the Lord will again make a distinction between the livestock of the Israelites and that of the Egyptians. Not a single one of Israel's animals will die! – Exodus 9:4 NLT

The God of the Israelites was going to protect His own, including all their animals. The plague would be targeted and discriminating in its impact. Only those animals that belonged to Egyptians would suffer death.



And God announced that the starting time for the plague was already on the divine calendar. The devastation was scheduled to begin the very next day. And like clockwork, as the morning dawned, “all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but the Israelites didn’t lose a single animal” (Exodus 9:6 NLT). But, as before, Pharaoh was unshaken by this blow to his country’s economy and his people’s religious foundation. Surrounded by dead animal carcasses, he sent officials to see if what

Moses had said was true. This delegation of royal emissaries made their way to Goshen where they were shocked to see that not a single goat, bull, ram, or camel had succumbed to the effects of the plague. All was well in Goshen.

And yet, true to form, “Pharaoh’s heart remained stubborn, and he still refused to let the people go. – Exodus 9:7 NLT

Plague Number 6

⁸ And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹ It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” ¹⁰ So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. ¹¹ And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. ¹² But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses. – Exodus 9:8-12 ESV

Following Pharaoh’s latest demonstration of hard-heartedness, Moses and Aaron are given further instructions from God. This time, the judgment that God brings upon the Egyptians will be unannounced and bring with it an increased level of physical pain and suffering. With each successive plague, God was upping the ante and revealing yet another aspect of His power and authority over kings, nations, creation, and all the mythical, man-made gods of humanity.

These assignments would have served as tests for Moses and Aaron, determining the depth of their faith and the level of their faithfulness. It must not have been easy to stand before one of the most powerful men in the world and issue demands from an unseen God. And many of the things God commanded Moses and Aaron to do were outside the pale of human reason and required a great deal of trust. Each new directive from Jehovah took them into unexplored territory and required them to exhibit an increased level of faith in His ability to do the impossible.

In this case, God commanded His two servants to take ash from a kiln and disperse it into the air. And for some reason, it was Moses who was to take the lead in carrying out this latest supernatural sign. When Moses tossed the ash into the air, it would turn into a fine dust that would spread throughout the land of Egypt, “causing festering boils to break out on people and animals throughout the land” (Exodus 9:9 NLT).

It’s likely that this “kiln” or furnace was used in the manufacture of bricks. This would have tied the ashes to the suffering of the Israelites.

*...the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. They made their lives bitter, **forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks** and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.* – Exodus 1:13-14 NLT

*Pharaoh sent this order to the Egyptian slave drivers and the Israelite foremen: “Do not supply any more straw for making bricks. Make the people get it themselves! But still **require them to make the same number of bricks as before.** Don’t reduce the quota.”* – Exodus 5:6-8 NLT

These massive kilns would have been located all over the land of Egypt, wherever there was a state-sanctioned construction site. These furnaces would have contained the ashes of the straw that the Israelites had been forced to scavenge and knead into the clay that they formed into the bricks used to build edifices to Pharaoh's glory. It is almost as if God was taking the unjust pain and suffering of His people and spreading it among their Egyptian overlords. And no one was spared. The rich and the poor alike would suffer the debilitating effects of this plague as the dust settled on their skin and produced boils (*šihîn*) or inflamed spots on the skin that erupted and became festering sores (*'ăḇa'bu'ōt*). There is no way to determine the identity of this skin disease, but it must have been extremely painful and left its suffering unable to perform even the simplest tasks. The text indicates that Pharaoh's magicians were completely incapacitated and "unable to stand before Moses, because the boils had broken out on them and all the Egyptians" (Exodus 9:11 NLT).

These men had been able to replicate some of the previous signs that Moses and Aaron performed, but not in this case. And it seems highly unlikely that they would have wanted to reproduce this particular sign, even if they could.

As Pharaoh looked on, Moses carried out the command of God, and the king and his royal officials watched the ash turn to dust, miraculously spread over the land, and then settle back down on their own skin. But it appears that Pharaoh was exempted from the effects of this plague. Moses indicates that "the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians" (Exodus 9:11 ESV), but he doesn't mention Pharaoh. It seems that God was sparing Pharaoh and preparing him for the final plague that was designed to bring judgment right to his doorstep. God had reserved something far more painful and personal for Pharaoh. He even foreshadowed this final plague when He spoke to Moses in Midian.

"When you arrive back in Egypt, go to Pharaoh and perform all the miracles I have empowered you to do. But I will harden his heart so he will refuse to let the people go. Then you will tell him, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son. I commanded you, 'Let my son go, so he can worship me.' But since you have refused, I will now kill your firstborn son!'" – Exodus 4:21-23 NLT



But for now, Pharaoh was forced to stand back and watch the God of Israel demonstrate His sovereign power through a nationwide pandemic that brought intense pain but not death. And like all the other plagues, this one was a direct attack on the gods of the Egyptians. It only makes sense that those suffering from this disease would have called out to their gods for deliverance and healing. They would have sought relief from one of their many deities.

In the Egyptian pantheon of gods, Serapis was a lord of healing and of fertility. Interestingly enough, this god's cult was celebrated in association with that of the sacred Egyptian bull Apis, which we looked at with the last plague. The priests and priestesses associated with Serapis would have been expected to

call upon their god for healing. But, like the magicians, they would have found themselves unable to perform their priestly duties because of the very malady they were hoping to eliminate.

They called out, but no one answered. They begged for relief, but none came. The sores erupted on their skin but no miracle was forthcoming. It was as if their gods had grown silent or apathetic about their plight. But It is simply a demonstration of the truth that the psalmist would later articulate.

*Our God is in the heavens,
and he does as he wishes.
Their idols are merely things of silver and gold,
shaped by human hands.
They have mouths but cannot speak,
and eyes but cannot see.
They have ears but cannot hear,
and noses but cannot smell.
They have hands but cannot feel,
and feet but cannot walk,
and throats but cannot make a sound.
And those who make idols are just like them,
as are all who trust in them. – Psalm 115:3-8 NLT*



When Separis proved impotent, they must have turned to Imhotep, the god of medicine and the guardian of healing sciences. This particular god had actually been a man who had served as the second king of Egypt's third dynasty. After his death, he was deified and worshiped by the Egyptians as the god of medicine.

But he too proved helpless before the God of Israel because he was a fraud and a fake. None of their gods were real and, therefore, they had no hope of delivering the people of Egypt from their pain and suffering. These so-called gods were the figments of men's imaginations, just as Jeremiah the prophet later wrote.

*"Their gods are like
helpless scarecrows in a cucumber field!
They cannot speak,
and they need to be carried because they cannot walk.
Do not be afraid of such gods,
for they can neither harm you nor do you any good." – Jeremiah 10:5 NLT*

So, the ash went up, the dust rained down, the boils broke open, and the people cried out. But no relief was in sight. And Pharaoh remained unmoved by what he saw. At this point, he stood aloof and distant from the pain of his people. He was not having to share in their suffering, so he was unmoved by their plight. Moses indicates that “he did not listen to them, as the Lord had spoken to Moses” (Exodus 9:12 ESV). But this time, it was God who hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

Anywhere along the way, God could have miraculously moved in Pharaoh’s life and softened the hardened condition of his heart. But He continued to allow the king to display the natural evidence of his sinful disposition. Rather than intervene, God allowed Pharaoh’s inherent wickedness to take its normal course. This demonstrates the way that God has always worked with fallen mankind. Paul describes it well in his letter to the Romans.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! – Romans 1:22-25 ESV

Pharaoh stood his ground. But he was up against far greater and more powerful than he could ever imagine. All the plagues should have served as a wake-up call but God exactly what it was going to take to open Pharaoh’s eyes and break the hardened callouses of his heart. But the time for that plague had not yet come.

Plague Number 7

¹³ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and present yourself 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 yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. ¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹ Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.'"" ²⁰ Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, ²¹ but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field.

²² Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt."

²³ Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. ²⁴ There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. ²⁶ Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸ Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."

²⁹ Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so 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 (The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³² But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up.) ³³ So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and stretched out his hands to the Lord, and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth. ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. ³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses. – Exodus 9:13-35 ESV

In his written chronicle of these events, Moses provides no timeline, so it is difficult to know if there was any delay between the various plagues. The sixth plague, which featured anthrax-like skin lesions, must have eventually come to an end but Moses provides no details. And it is impossible to tell whether any time was given for the Egyptians to heal before the next plague began. Moses simply states that God told him to “Get up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh” (Exodus 9:13 NLT). This could have been the very next day after his last conversation with Pharaoh or it could have been months later. But whatever the case, God sent Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh with the very same request they had repeatedly made.

“Let my people go, so they can worship me.” – Exodus 9:13 NLT

And, this time, God provided Moses with an important addendum to His original request.

“If you don’t, I will send more plagues on you and your officials and your people. Then you will know that there is no one like me in all the earth.” – Exodus 9:13 NLT

God wanted Pharaoh to know that the worst was yet to come. If the king continued to resist God’s request, the people of Egypt would suffer even greater distress and, this time, God let Pharaoh know that their very existence was in His hands.

“By now I could have lifted my hand and struck you and your people with a plague to wipe you off the face of the earth. But I have spared you for a purpose—to show you my power and to spread my fame throughout the earth. But you still lord it over my people and refuse to let them go.” – Exodus 9:15-17 NLT

In a display of divine mercy, God informed Pharaoh of the exact nature of the next plague. He was going to send a hail storm so intense that if the Egyptians did not provide shelter for their livestock and servants, they would be pummeled to death. Anyone or anything that remained outdoors would die as a result of this supernatural storm. This message seems to have been directed to Pharaoh and his court officials. These would have been some of the wealthiest men in Egypt and they would have had possessed large land holdings where they grew crops and grazed their livestock. Moses indicates that some of these men took seriously the warning passed on to them from Moses and did as he had suggested. But others scoffed at the words of Moses and his God.

At the Lord’s command, Moses lifted his staff in the air and, immediately, the storm began, and it was like nothing the Egyptians had ever seen before. This was no ordinary hail storm. It was a divinely ordained, supernatural display of God’s power over all creation. And it was yet another direct attack on the gods of Egypt. Moses leaves nothing to the imagination when it comes to the destructive power of this storm.

The Lord sent a tremendous hailstorm against all the land of Egypt. Never in all the history of Egypt had there been a storm like that, with such devastating hail and continuous lightning. It left all of Egypt in ruins. The hail struck down everything in the

open field—people, animals, and plants alike. Even the trees were destroyed. — Exodus 9:23-25 NLT

The Egyptian gods responsible for the care and well-being of livestock were powerless to do their jobs. Any animals left in the fields were destroyed by the massive hailstones that fell from the sky. Others were struck down by the lightning bolts that emanated from the dark storm clouds. Crops were completely destroyed. Trees were stripped of their limbs, leaves, and fruit. It was as if the Egyptian gods were doing battle with one another.



The goddess, Nut, was believed to be responsible for holding up the sky and was often portrayed as a woman arched over the earth. Underneath her body lay her brother, Geb, the earth god. Together, these two gods, along with Shu, the god of the air, held the world together. The heavens, sky, and earth were protected by this trinity of Egyptian gods. But, on this occasion, they failed to do their jobs. From the domain of Shu came devastating hail that damaged the realm of

Geb. To the Egyptians, it appeared as if Shu's sister, Tefnut, the goddess of moisture, was playing a role by sending torrential rains along with the hail. And the violent nature of the storm did not seem to fit their understanding of Shu, who was associated with dry air and calm, and was supposed to provide a cooling and calming influence over the world. In a land where rain was sporadic at best, this storm was unsettling and anything but calming in its influence. For the Egyptians, it was as if all their gods were at war with one another.

"What would the worshippers of Nut have thought when they looked skyward not to see the blessings of the sun and warmth, but the tragedy of storm and violence. Nut was the sky goddess. It was from her domain that this tragedy originated. One reflects upon the responsibilities of both Isis and Seth who also had responsibilities relating to agricultural crops. The black and burned fields of flax were a silent testimony to the impotence and incapability of wooden and stone deities." — John Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*

But it was all the work of Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, and the one true God was doing what the gods of the Egyptians were powerless to do: Providing His chosen people with divine protection.

The only place without hail was the region of Goshen, where the people of Israel lived. — Exodus 9:26 NLT

It was as if a celestial dome had been erected over the land of Goshen, preventing the hail and lightning from reaching the Israelites and their property. They were completely safe. But the

Egyptians suffered greatly. Their losses were catastrophic. And it appears as if this plague got Pharaoh's attention.

"This time I have sinned," he confessed. "The Lord is the righteous one, and my people and I are wrong. Please beg the Lord to end this terrifying thunder and hail. We've had enough. I will let you go; you don't need to stay any longer." – Exodus 9:27-28 NLT

But Pharaoh's rather convincing display of remorse didn't fool anyone. Moses was well aware that this was yet another ploy to buy Pharaoh time. He had no intention of letting the Israelites go but simply wanted the storm to end. So, Moses offered to intercede with God on behalf of the Egyptians, but he also informed Pharaoh that he knew he was lying.

"As soon as I leave the city, I will lift my hands and pray to the Lord. Then the thunder and hail will stop, and you will know that the earth belongs to the Lord. But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God." – Exodus 9:29-30 NLT

Despite the devastating damage done by the storm, Pharaoh once again hardened his heart and refused to keep his word. He had lived to resist another day. His kingdom lay in ruins. All crops were destroyed. Fruit-bearing trees were shorn of their produce. Tens of thousands of sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and donkeys lay lifeless in the fields. And it is likely that many of the poorer Egyptians were struck down by the plague as they attempted to save their livestock as the hail rained down.

With this plague, death becomes a dark reality in God's intensifying display of divine judgment. No longer will discomfort and inconvenience be the sole outcomes of His wrath. Now the lives of the Egyptians themselves will be susceptible to God's righteous indignation. No one and nothing was outside His reach or protected from His judgment. Not even Pharaoh.

Plague Number 8

¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.”

³ So Moses and Aaron went in 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 country, ⁵ and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, ⁶ and they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.’” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

⁷ Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?”

⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, “Go, serve the Lord your God. But which ones are to go?” ⁹ Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.” ¹⁰ But he said to them, “The Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. ¹¹ No! Go, the men among you, and serve the Lord, for that is what you are asking.” And 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, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.” ¹³ So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. ¹⁴ The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. ¹⁵ They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. ¹⁷ Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the Lord your God only to remove this death from me.” ¹⁸ So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the Lord. ¹⁹ And the Lord turned the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. ²⁰ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go. — Exodus 10:1-20 ESV

Exodus 12:12 contains a stunning statement from God that comes well after He has delivered nine of the ten plagues on the nation of Egypt. He simply states, “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord” (Exodus 12:12 ESV). As He prepares to launch the tenth and final judgment, He reminds Moses and Aaron that every one of the devastating signs He has sent upon Egypt has been a direct assault on their false and, therefore, unreliable gods.



And chapter ten contains Moses’ account of the eighth plague which brought a supernatural infestation of locusts upon the land. This too meant to pit the God of the Israelites against one or more of the gods of Egypt. Locusts were nothing new to the Egyptians. These voracious and destructive insects were a normal part of life in that region of the world. Their arrival and the subsequent damage they could do to all vegetation could wreak havoc on the Egyptian agricultural economy. That’s why the Egyptians had gods they relied upon to ward off this destructive menace, including the grain gods Neper, Nepri, Heneb, and Renenutet, as well as Isis and Set, two gods responsible for protecting the nation’s crops. Renenutet, in particular, was revered as a goddess of nourishment and the harvest. She was responsible for the fertility of the fields but was also deemed the protector of the royal office and power.

But with this eighth plague, God would bring another wave of destruction upon the land that would virtually destroy the nation’s economy and cripple Pharaoh’s administration.

God makes it clear to Moses that Pharaoh’s hardness of heart has all been part of the plan. From the very beginning, God had intended to bring a series of judgments against the Egyptians that would prepare the way for His people’s deliverance. Each plague was pre-planned and necessary and, all combined, they would have a cumulative effect that eventually forced Pharaoh to submit to God’s will. Not only that, they would serve as powerful reminders to the people of Israel of God’s power and providence.

“I have made him and his officials stubborn so I can display my miraculous signs among them. I’ve also done it so you can tell your children and grandchildren about how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and about the signs I displayed among them—and so you will know that I am the Lord.” – Exodus 10:1-2 NLT

Moses and Aaron did as they had done so many times before. They came before Pharaoh and delivered their latest message from God.

“Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse, watch out! For tomorrow I will bring a swarm of locusts on your country. They will cover the land so that you won’t be able to see the ground. They will devour what little is left of your crops after the

hailstorm, including all the trees growing in the fields. They will overrun your palaces and the homes of your officials and all the houses in Egypt. Never in the history of Egypt have your ancestors seen a plague like this one!” – Exodus 10:3-6 NLT

But, by now, the reader has already come to expect the same outcome as before. Pharaoh will reject their warning. And that is exactly what happens, despite the pleas of Pharaoh’s officials. They warn the king that the nation may not survive another assault from the Israelite’s God. The plague of hail left their crops and orchards in ruin. What was not destroyed would most certainly be devastated by an infestation of locusts. So, they strongly suggested that Pharaoh make a concession to allow the men of Israel to go and worship their God. By demanding that the women and children remain in Goshen, it would ensure that the men would return to their families. In a sense, Pharaoh’s counselors were suggesting that he use the women and children as hostages.

But when Pharaoh announces his intention to let only the men go and worship, Moses argued, “We must all join together in celebrating a festival to the Lord” (Exodus 10:9 NLT). Unused to having his will opposed, Pharaoh erupted against Moses and told him that the deal was off. It was going to be his way or no way at all. At this, Moses and Aaron left the king’s presence and the locusts descended upon the land.

...the locusts swarmed over the whole land of Egypt, settling in dense swarms from one end of the country to the other. It was the worst locust plague in Egyptian history, and there has never been another one like it. – Exodus 10:14 NLT



Once again, the gods of Egypt proved powerless to stand before Jehovah. The Egyptians probably cried out to their gods, but there was no answer. They offered sacrifices and offerings, but there was no relief in sight. Wave after wave of locusts descended upon their fields and orchards, devouring “every plant in the fields and all the fruit on the trees that had survived the

hailstorm” (Exodus 10:15 NLT).

And it didn’t take long before Moses and Aaron were summoned back into Pharaoh’s presence. They had gotten his attention and he was ready to negotiate. But first, he begged them to pray to their God so that this latest plight might come to an end.

“Forgive my sin, just this once, and plead with the Lord your God to take away this death from me.” – Exodus 10:17 NLT

He appears to be sincere. His pride appears to be broken. But after Moses prayed and God miraculously removed every last locust from the land of Egypt, Pharaoh resorted back to his old stubborn ways and refused to let the people go.

The land lay in utter disarray, devastated by the effects of the hail and the damage done by the locusts. But Pharaoh remained steadfast in his refusal to give in to God's demands. He still thought he was in control. Despite all that God had done to his land, Pharaoh believed he remained the king over his domain. His great pride would not allow him to bend the knee to another, even the all-powerful God of the Israelites. He somehow believed he could win this battle of wills. But what he failed to understand was that the sovereign will of Yahweh can be resisted but never thwarted. Pharaoh could stubbornly stand his ground, but he would one day bow his knee to the all-powerful, all-knowing God of the universe.

Plague Number 9

²¹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. ²³ They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived. ²⁴ Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, “Go, serve the Lord; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.” ²⁵ But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. ²⁶ Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there.” ²⁷ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go. ²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.” ²⁹ Moses said, “As you say! I will not see your face again.” – Exodus 10:21-28 ESV

In reading all the details concerning the various plagues, it is easy to overlook the reason for their very existence. Yes, it is clear that Pharaoh’s stubbornness played a role in each plague’s arrival, but it is important to consider what Pharaoh was rejecting. Repeatedly, God made the same request that the arrogant king refused to honor.

“Let my people go, that they may serve me.” – Exodus 10:3 ESV

What sounded like a request was actually a demand from the God of the universe. He was not asking Pharaoh for permission; He was demanding full compliance with His sovereign will. From the beginning, God had made it clear to Moses and Aaron that they were there to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, and Pharaoh was expected to comply with God’s preordained plans.

“You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” – Exodus 7:2 ESV

From the very first moment Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh, they had clearly articulated Yahweh’s demands. There was never a question as to what God wanted from Pharaoh. Prior to each successive plague, Moses and Aaron made the Lord’s demands known.

“Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness.” – Exodus 7:16 ESV

“Let my people go, that they may serve me.” – Exodus 8:1 ESV

“Let my people go, that they may serve me.” – Exodus 8:20 ESV

“Let my people go, that they may serve me.” – Exodus 9:1 ESV

“Let my people go, that they may serve me.” – Exodus 9:13 ESV

“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me.” – Exodus 10:3 ESV

But there is an interesting and often overlooked pattern to these repeated demands. With every third plague, God does not issue any demands or give Pharaoh an opportunity to respond. He simply acts.

With the third plague, God told Aaron, “Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt” (Exodus 7:16 ESV). There was no formal appointment between Pharaoh and God’s messengers. No demands were issued and no response was necessary. God simply ordered the land to be filled with an infestation of gnats.

Now, fast-forward to the sixth plague. Once again, rather than have Moses and Aaron reiterate His demands, God chose to pour out another judgment upon Egypt.

“Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” – Exodus 9:8-9 ESV

Pharaoh was a non-factor in this entire process. He was not consulted and, therefore, he had no say in the matter. The sovereign God acted independently and authoritatively, orchestrating His divine judgment against the unsuspecting people of Egypt.

And with the ninth plague, the pattern repeats itself. As with plagues three and six, plague nine comes with no warning. God makes no effort to inform Pharaoh of the consequences of refusing His demands. The king has made his will known. He has no intention of conceding to God’s command. In the face of God’s unrelenting and unstoppable displays of divine judgment, Pharaoh has remained resolute in his decision of non-compliance. So, God tells Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt” (Exodus 10:21 ESV).

The nation was still reeling from the devastating damage done by the locusts. What little vegetation had not been destroyed by the hail was completely wiped out by the supernatural swarm of locusts. Even Pharaoh’s counselors had warned him that his continued stubbornness was going to result in the complete destruction of their nation.

“Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” – Exodus 10:7 ESV

But Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened. He refused to bow his knee to Israel’s God. So, God ordered Moses to stretch out his hand and, immediately, an all-pervasive darkness came over the entire land of Egypt. For three solid days, “the people could not see each other, and no one moved” (Exodus 10:23 NLT). This was no ordinary darkness. It was a complete absence of light.

No sun. No moon. No stars. It was impossible for anyone to see. All normal activities came to a complete halt as people remained inside their homes, huddled around the light from their oil lamps. No one dared to venture outside.

But there was light as usual where the people of Israel lived. – Exodus 10:23 NLT

As He had done before, God spared the people of Israel from the effects of this particular plague. Somehow, they were given light while the rest of the nation was blanketed in an opaque and oppressive darkness. The apostle John describes light as a primary characteristic of God.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. – 1 John 1:5 ESV

The prophet Isaiah would later write to the people of Israel, “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD” (Isaiah 2:5 ESV). With this ninth plague, God was demonstrating the reality of His light-giving presence. He was with His people. His light shined in the darkness that pervaded the rest of the land. In Him is no darkness at all. But in Egypt, the people were immersed in unpenetrable darkness. And what makes this plague so significant is the statement it made regarding Egypt’s most revered god.



Of all their deities, one stood out as the greatest of them all. Ra was considered the king of all the Egyptian gods and was believed to be the father of all creation. And because of his superior position among the gods, he was afforded great power and authority. He controlled the sun and light, and was responsible for the heavens and all power, including that of the king. He was sometimes portrayed riding through the heavens in a celestial boat, with the sun resting on his bird-like head.

He is one of the oldest deities in the Egyptian pantheon and was later merged with others such as Horus, becoming Ra-Horakhty (the morning sun), Amun (as noonday sun), and Atum (the evening sun) associated with primal life-giving energy. Ra is the Egyptian word for ‘sun’. As a solar deity, Ra embodied the power of the sun but was also thought to be the sun itself, envisioned as the great god riding in his barge across the heavens throughout the day and descending into the underworld at sunset. – <http://www.worldhistory.org>

One can only imagine the impact this plague of darkness had on the people of Egypt. Their revered God had literally disappeared from sight. Ra wasn't just responsible for the sun, he was the sun itself. The God of Israel had vanquished the most powerful god of the Egyptians. And yet, in Goshen, the light was bright and comforting because Yahweh was present with His people.

With his patron god sidelined, Pharaoh decided it was time to concede to the God of Moses and Aaron. But, once again, he decided to try and bargain with Yahweh.

Finally, Pharaoh called for Moses. "Go and worship the Lord," he said. "But leave your flocks and herds here. You may even take your little ones with you." – Exodus 10:24 NLT

He would no longer prevent the women and children from accompanying their husbands and fathers. But, as a precaution, Pharaoh forbade the Israelites from taking any of their flocks or herds. He wanted collateral to ensure that the Israelites would return to the land of Goshen. Pharaoh was not about to risk losing his largest unpaid workforce. But Moses refused to accept Pharaoh's terms.

"...you must provide us with animals for sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord our God. All our livestock must go with us, too; not a hoof can be left behind. We must choose our sacrifices for the Lord our God from among these animals. And we won't know how we are to worship the Lord until we get there." – Exodus 10:25-26 NLT

And true to form, Pharaoh dug in his heels and rejected Moses' conditions. Fully frustrated by the actions of these two elderly Hebrews, Pharaoh cast them out of his presence and warned them never to return, upon pain of death.

"Never come back to see me again! The day you see my face, you will die!" – Exodus 10:28 NLT

And Moses politely and calmly replied, "As you say! I will not see your face again" (Exodus 10:29 ESV).

God was about to do something great. With the ninth plague, He was setting up His final and most devastating judgment against the people of Egypt. As the helpless Egyptians huddled in the darkness, the children of God were basking in the light of God's presence. And that light was about to burst forth in glorious day as God unveiled the last phase of His grand plan of redemption for His people.

The prophet Isaiah wrote of a yet-future day when God will deliver His people yet again. But it reminds us that the story of Exodus is a foreshadowing of an even greater deliverance to come.

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;*

*those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shone.
 You have multiplied the nation;
 you have increased its joy;
 they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
 For the yoke of his burden,
 and the staff for his shoulder,
 the rod of his oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian. – Isaiah 9:2-4 ESV*

And Isaiah goes on to reveal the nature of this future light that will penetrate the darkness of man's captivity to sin and death.

*For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given;
 and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 and his name shall be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Of the increase of his government and of peace
 there will be no end,
 on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. – Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV*

