

## **Plagues that Preach Part 1**

**Text:** Exodus 7:1-25

### **Introduction:**

1. Concerning the Book of Exodus, Philip Ryken writes, “Exodus is a God-centred Book with a God-centred message that teaches us to have a God-centred life.”
2. In this chapter God responds with grace again to Moses doubts, giving him and Aaron further instructions, revelation and encouragement for their mission. The first sign is performed which is then followed the next day with the first of the ten plagues.
3. The word ‘plague’ means “a blow, a stroke”. God’s hand of judgment was striking blows on Egypt and its false religious system of idolatry. These plagues preach in that they reveal much about God and His power.
4. Note several introductory points about the plagues:
  - “After the initial personal sign to Pharaoh of Moses’ rod becoming a serpent, there are nine further signs which divide into three groups of three, followed by the final and tenth sign which led to Pharaoh driving the Israelites from his land.” (Grant)
  - The signs that commenced each group of three were announced to Pharaoh in the morning. The signs which ended each group, i.e. signs three, six and nine, were carried out without any announcement being made.
  - The groupings are as follows:

### **Group One**

The reason given (7:17)

Sign 1: The waters of Egypt are turned to blood and the fish die.

Sign 2: Frogs cover the land.

Sign 3: Dust becomes lice throughout the land

### **Group two**

The reason given (8:22)

Sign 4: the land is filled with swarms of flies

Sign 5: A plague on all cattle.

Sign 6: Boils upon man and beast.

### **Group three**

The reason given (9:16)

Sign 7: A grievous hail which destroys cattle

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Sign 8: Locusts invade the land

Sign 9: Darkness over Egypt

### Final Sign

Sign 10: The death of the firstborn

5. We will study this chapter under **three points**.

### I. THE PROLOGUE TO THE PLAGUES (VS. 1-7)

God responds again with love and grace to Moses doubts expressed in 6:30. This prologue to the plagues contains:

#### A. Instructions from God (Vs. 1-5)

God reveals:

1. The plan for his servants (Vs. 1-2)

They were to confront Pharaoh:

a. As God's Messengers (Vs. 1). God would make Moses like "a god" to Pharaoh. Of course, Moses was not literally a god but so great would his authority be over Pharaoh that he would be like a god in Pharaoh's eyes.

i. Note: It is interesting to see that Moses was to be in Egypt a "god man" of sorts. He typifies the true God-Man, Christ Jesus who came into this world, confronted and defeated Satan (typified by Pharaoh) and the world (typified by Egypt) and secured our salvation (Exodus) from sin.

ii. We see the principle that God uses human instruments to carry out His work and to communicate His message on earth. God did not speak to Pharaoh directly from heaven. He spoke through Moses and Aaron.

b. With God's Message (Vs. 2). They were to speak "all" that God commanded. They were not to add to God's message or take away from it but deliver it purely and faithfully. Preaching "all the counsel of God" is still the preachers duty! (Acts 20:27). He has NO AUTHORITY to water down the message of God's Word. That is what most preachers do today. They delete things out of the message of God's Word to try and make the message more palatable to the world. That is treason against the Sovereign God of heaven! We need to remember the right definition of success. God's servants are not called to be successful but to be faithful.

2. The purpose of the plagues (Vs. 3-5)

God's Divine purpose behind what He was about to do is revealed to Moses and Aaron. God's purpose in the plagues was to:

a. Judge Pharaoh and Egypt (Vs. 3-4a)

i. Pharaoh would be judged (Vs. 3). God would harden Pharaoh's heart as an act of judgment. This would in turn provide a platform for the multiplication of God's wonders in Egypt. It is a reminder that to stubbornly

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- harden your heart against God is a serious thing. God will always have the final say as He is God!
- ii. Egypt would be judged (Vs. 4a). This was totally just when you consider what Egypt had done to God's chosen people Israel. Genesis 12:3 "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."
  - iii. Egypt's false gods would be judged (Ex. 12:12). James Boice writes that this "battle pitted Jehovah, the true God, who moved Moses and Israel, against all the false gods of the Egyptian pantheon, backed by a host of fallen angels who had turned from God as a part of Lucifer's original rebellion." He further explains, "In order to understand these plagues we need to understand that they were directed against the gods and goddesses of Egypt and were intended to show the superiority of the God of Israel to the Egyptian gods. There were about eighty major deities in Egypt, all clustered about the three great natural forces of Egyptian life: The Nile River, the land, and the sky. It does not surprise us, therefore, that the plagues God sent against Egypt in this historic battle follow this three-force pattern. The first two plagues were against the gods of the Nile. The next four were against the land gods. The final four were against the gods of the sky, culminating in the death of the firstborn."
  - b. Liberate His people (Vs. 4b). The mighty power of God through the great judgments on Egypt would culminate in the emancipation of the enslaved nation of Israel.
  - c. Exalt His Person (Vs. 5) Through the mighty demonstration of God's power through the plagues He would pour out on Egypt, people would come to know that the God of Israel was the living and true God. "The plagues demonstrated that Jehovah God had the power to control nature (the water turned to blood), the animal kingdom (the frogs, lice, flies, and locust plagues), diseases (the murrain and boils plagues), the weather (the hail plague), light and darkness (the darkness plague), and life and death (the slaying of the firstborn plague). When the plagues were over, the evidence was overwhelming that God had power to control all of creation." (Butler) God does all things for His own glory (Rev. 4:11).
    - i. Egypt would know that Jehovah is God (Ex. 7:5)
    - ii. Israel would know that Jehovah is God (Ex. 10:1-2)
    - iii. The world would know that Jehovah is God (Ex. 9:13-16)

### B. Submission from God's Servants (Vs. 6-7)

1. The totality of their obedience (Vs. 6). Praise God Moses did not allow his doubts to turn into rebellion. He obeyed God despite the struggles he was having with doubts. He stepped out in obedient faith. Moses' and Aaron's obedience is emphasised three times in

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this chapter (See Vs. 10 & 20). Why were these men so mightily used of God? They obeyed the Lord's instructions!

2. The time of their obedience (Vs. 7) Moses' and Aaron's ages are given as 80 and 83 years respectively. Praise God for 80-year-olds who take obedience and service to God seriously!

### II. THE PRELUDE TO THE PLAGUES (VS. 8-13)

Before the plagues were poured out, God first gave Pharaoh a sign through his servants. We could call this miracle "the staff that swallowed the snakes" (Ryken). Ryken further notes "This brief episode serves as a preview of the plagues. It introduces nearly all the main themes of the next five chapters of Exodus: the obedience of Moses and Aaron, the counterfeit miracles of Satan and his servants, the superior power of God and his rod, and the perpetual hardening of Pharaoh's heart."

#### A. The Source of the Miracle (Vs. 8-9)

1. Moses and Aaron were not operating on the basis of their own ideas. Every action they took in this showdown with Pharaoh was in obedience to Divine Revelation.
2. God had prepared Moses for this sign back at the burning bush (Ex. 4:2-4).

#### B. The Sign of the Miracle (Vs. 10)

1. The Hebrew word for snake (*tannin*) refers to a large, venomous snake.
2. This sign was full of symbolic significance within the context of Egypt and its religious beliefs. The serpent was not only worshipped as a god, it was a prominent symbol of the Pharaohs. Many Egyptians carried charms to protect them from Apophis, the serpent-god who personified evil. "Egyptian literature contains various spells and incantations to afford protection from snakebite. It was this fear of snakes that led Pharaoh to use the serpent as the symbol of his royal authority. His ceremonial headdress – like the famous death-mask of Tutankhamen – was crested with a fierce female cobra. The idea was that Pharaoh would terrorize his enemies the way a cobra strikes fear into her prey." (Ryken) When a Pharaoh ascended the throne of Egypt, he would take the royal crown and say an oath to the snake god (See Ryken Pg. 184).
3. By Aaron taking the rod and casting it to the ground, it was a direct challenge to the serpent god of Egypt and the symbol of Pharaoh's power. It demonstrated the supremacy of Israel's God over the serpent god of Egypt.
4. Moses mastery over the serpent typifies Christ's mastery over the great Serpent, the devil and Satan. Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

#### C. The Satanic imitating of the Miracle (Vs. 11-12)

1. The men called to Pharaoh's aid are called "wise men", "sorcerers" and "magicians". The "wise men" relied on worldly wisdom (James 3:15). Attempts to find wisdom and truth outside of Christ are doomed to fail (See Col. 2:3). "Sorcerers" are those who engage in witchcraft and the occult. "Magicians" were sacred scribes skilled

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in Egyptian writing who were engaged as priests in the Egyptian religions. Goran Larsson describes the role they played in Egyptian society: “Magic was the main element in the Egyptian religion at this time, and those who mastered these powers were held in high esteem. The priests, belonging to the highest officials of Pharaoh, possessed secret knowledge and were skilled in all sorts of mysterious rites. By casting spells, they could allegedly overpower humans and control gods and thereby attain dominion over the world of nature and the world of the gods, realms which could not be separated since some animals were regarded as divine. Through magical formulas, the magicians claimed to exercise the power of the gods. The master of magic therefore became a player in the world of the gods.”

2. Pharaoh summons his magicians and through Satanic power (enchantments), they also turned their rods into serpents. It is a reminder that the god of this world does have power, even to perform some miracles. The Egyptian magicians were able to mimic the first three miracles – snakes, blood and frogs but from the fourth plague they could not.
3. The Holy Spirit gives us the names of the two prominent magicians who confronted Moses in 2 Timothy 3:8 “Now as Jannes and Jambres **withstood** Moses, so do these also **resist** (to stand against, oppose) the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.” They are cited as examples in the context of Paul’s warning concerning the apostates of the last days (Vs. 1-7). The last day apostates will have the same spirit of resistance to the truth as the resistance exhibited by Pharaoh’s magicians. This was more than the magicians wanting to display their Satanic powers. They were actively trying to prove the gods of Egypt were superior to the One True God of Israel. They were opposing the truth being declared by Moses and Aaron.
4. The supremacy of God’s power over Satan’s is demonstrated when Aaron’s rod swallows up the magicians’ rods. Through God’s power, Moses defeats the serpent god of Egypt. In like manner, Christ defeated the serpent Satan at the cross!

### **D. The Stubbornness after the Miracle (Vs. 13)**

1. Despite the clear demonstration of the power of God and the superiority of Israel’s God, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he would not listen.
2. Pharaoh provides a classic example of the wilful unbeliever. The unbelieving heart looks for reasons not to believe rather than reasons to believe. To Pharaoh, the fact his magicians could replicate the miracle was sufficient excuse to reject the authority of Jehovah God.

## **III. THE PREMIER OF THE PLAGUES (VS. 14-25)**

The first plague is now poured out on Egypt – the Nile River is turned into blood. “For the Egyptians, the Nile was their mode of transportation, their source of nourishment, their standard for measurement, and even an object of worship...In one Divine blow, God gave the Egyptians a water and food

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shortage, a transportation shutdown, a financial disaster, and a spiritual crisis.” (Ryken)

### **A. The Proclamation before the Plague (Vs. 14-18)**

God commands Moses and Aaron to confront Pharaoh again the next morning. Pharaoh would receive another warning before the plague was released on Egypt. Pharaoh was given ample opportunity to repent before God’s judgment was poured out.

1. The place of the confrontation (Vs. 14-15).
  - a. Moses was instructed to meet Pharaoh at the river’s edge in the morning. God informs his servants of the Pharaoh’s movements ahead of time! He was to take the rod which had been turned into a snake in his hand as the symbol of Divine authority and power.
  - b. It appears it was a practice of Pharaoh to go to the Nile in the morning. It may have been for the purpose of bathing or even a worship ritual.
  - c. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River as a god. “The Nile was worshipped as a beneficent deity, in whose honour hymns were chanted by the priests. The papyri furnish the very words of those ancient odes.” (F.B. Meyer) Others tell us a temple was built in most cities to honour this god, and that the god was pictured as a man with his mouth open and water issuing from it as the Egyptians did not know the source of the river. This plague would make it clear that the river god was much inferior to Jehovah God. (Butler) In fact, there were three Egyptian deities connected with the Nile River. “One was the great Osiris, the god of the Nile, who was depicted with the river running through his bloodstream. Another was Nu, the god of the life of the river. The most important was Hapi, the god of the flood. Hapi was a fertility god who was portrayed as a bearded man with female breasts and a pregnant stomach.” (Ryken)
2. The message of the proclamation (Vs. 16-18)
  - a. The Divine source of the message (Vs. 16a, 17a). Again, we note that God gave Moses the message to deliver. He went to Pharaoh with an authoritative “Thus saith the LORD” message.
  - b. The rebuke in the message (Vs. 16b). There was a clear rebuke in this message to Pharaoh for his disobedience to the Divine command. Pharaoh was warned before the plague was poured out. Matthew Henry wisely observed, “God warns before He wounds.”
  - c. The revelation in the message (Vs. 17-18) Both the purpose and the particulars of the plague are revealed.
    - i. Purpose – “In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD” (Vs. 17a)
    - ii. Particulars – the waters would be turned to blood (Vs. 17b), the fish in the river would die (Vs. 18a), the river would stink (Vs. 18b) and the people would be loathed to drink from it (Vs. 18c).

### **B. The Pouring out of the Plague (Vs. 19-25)**

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1. The source of the plague (Vs. 19).
  - a. Again, we see God give Moses the instructions. This was not Moses judgment. It was a Divine judgment and God would work through Aaron and Moses to see it unleashed on Egypt. Not only would this plague affect the Nile River, but all of Egypt's water sources.
  - b. This plague was Divine justice for Egypt. Pharaoh and the Egyptians had shed much innocent blood by throwing the Hebrew boys into the Nile River to be drowned and devoured by its crocodiles. God would not judge Egypt by turning that very river into blood. God is a God of perfect justice!
2. The sign of the plague (Vs. 20-21)
  - a. In a dramatic demonstration before Pharaoh and his servants, Aaron strikes the river with his rod. As soon as Aaron's rod struck the river, the water was turned into blood. This was a Divine miracle, not a natural phenomenon as some naturalistic scholars try to argue.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. The result was the death of the fish in the river, a terrible stench and blood throughout the land of Egypt. This lasted for seven days (Vs. 25).
3. The sorcery after the plague (Vs. 22-23)
  - a. The magicians again imitate the miracle and turn some water into blood. If they had such power, why did they not reverse the judgment God had just poured out?
  - b. In a dramatic show of wilful stubbornness and rebellion, Pharaoh turns from the scene before him and goes back into his palace.
4. The suffering from the plague (Vs. 24-25). In desperation the Egyptians dig for water near the river. What a picture of the unsaved world, trying to find a solution in their own strength to the sad fruit of their own pagan belief system. Seven days pass before this plague comes to an end.

### Conclusion:

1. Are you hardening your heart against the light of the Gospel? Turn to Christ before it is too late!
2. Are you receptive and committed to the whole counsel of God?
3. Will you obey God fully and know His power and blessing?

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Some try to argue that this was just a flow of red sediment from southern Egypt that had the appearance of blood! What miracle denying nonsense! The God who Created all things not only has the right to override natural laws, He has unlimited power to do so!