

More Plagues: Insects and Disease (Exodus 8:12-9:12)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. The Hebrews have been in Egypt for 400 years, now suffering under the cruel oppression of Pharaoh. They have cried out to the Lord for deliverance, and the Lord has sent Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and back to Canaan, the land promised to Abraham's descendants.
- b. Moses and Aaron have been sent to Pharaoh by the Lord, requesting that Pharaoh let the Hebrews go. Pharaoh has a hard heart, refuses to let the people go, and only increases their oppression.
- c. The Lord uses Moses and Aaron to bring a series of plagues upon Egypt, to pressure Pharaoh to let God's people go.
- d. In the previous lesson we discussed the *first two* (of the Ten) Plagues that were sent upon the Egyptians: *Water-to-Blood* and *Frogs*.
- e. The Ten Plagues, in order of their appearance, are:
 - i. Water to Blood (Covered in the previous lesson)
 - ii. Frogs (In the previous lesson)
 - iii. Gnats or Lice (*In the current lesson*)
 - iv. Flies (*In the current lesson*)
 - v. Livestock Disease (*In the current lesson*)
 - vi. Boils and Sores (*In the current lesson*)
 - vii. Hail (with Fire)
 - viii. Locusts
 - ix. Darkness
 - x. Death of the Firstborn (Passover)

II. The Third and Fourth Plagues: Lice (or Gnats) and Flies

- a. Read **Exodus 8:12-28**.

b. Storyline:

- i. Third plague: gnats (word used in the LXX) Some translations indicate lice, fleas or even mosquitos). In any event, these are extremely annoying, tiny, itchy-type insect pests.
 1. This is the first miracle that the Egyptian sorcerers cannot reproduce by either the occult or fakery. Therefore they conclude, "This must be *the finger of God!*"
 2. Pharaoh's heart is hardened, and he does not let Israel go.
- ii. Fourth plague: literally, dog-flies (from LXX). I think of the aggressive blood-sucking black flies here in New England. Swarms of blood-sucking flies like these can decimate or even kill cattle.
 1. But flies do not come upon the area where the Hebrews are.
 2. Pharaoh first agrees to let people sacrifice to the Lord, but to do so in Egypt (tries to negotiate with the Lord).
 3. Then Pharaoh *concedes and agrees again to let the Jews go* out of Egypt to sacrifice to their God.
 4. Moses calls out Pharaoh's past deceitfulness and prays for the flies to depart.
 5. Pharaoh hardens his (own) heart afterward and refuses to let the people go.
- iii. Lessons from the plague of gnats/lice (third plague)
 1. The sorcerers acknowledge to Pharaoh, for the first time, that this miracle must be from God. They become aware that they are clearly *out of their league!*
 2. This reference to "finger of God" strikes me as unusual. Where else in Scripture does it speak of the "finger of God"?
 - a. In the story of the Ten Commandments, it says that they were written on the stone tablets by "the finger of God".
 - i. "So when He made an end of speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, *written with the finger of God.*" (**Exodus 31:18**, LXX, OSB)
 - ii. There is a similar reference in **Deuteronomy 9:10**.

- b. (Perhaps some might think of finger of a hand writing on the plaster wall in **Daniel 5** story of Belshazzar's banquet. Others might think of Jesus bending down and writing on the ground in the story of the woman caught in adultery, in **John 8**.)
- c. There is just one other place in Scripture that I am aware of where this "finger of God" expression occurs. Read **Luke 11:14-26**.
 - i. Jesus insists that He is casting out demons "with the finger of God".
 - ii. He uses this to explain that He is *even more powerful than Satan* and the forces of evil allied with him.
- d. Eusebius (bishop of the church in Caesarea, writing c. 320 AD) lists several ways in which the things Jesus did were similar to, yet greater than what Moses did. In the midst of that discussion he points out:
 - i. "Moses, again, said that the law was written with the finger of God: for it is written: 'And He gave to Moses, when He ceased speaking to him in Mount Sinai, the two tables of witness, stone tables written with *the finger of God*.' (**Exodus 31:18**)
 - ii. "And in Exodus: 'The magicians therefore said to Pharaoh, "It is *the finger of God*.'" (**Exodus 8:19**)
 - iii. "In like manner Jesus, the Christ of God, said to the Pharisees: 'If I *by the finger of God* cast out devils.'" (**Luke 11:20**) (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3, chapter 2)
 - iv. The point Eusebius is making: this is one more example of a parallel between Jesus and Moses. Both performed miraculous signs "by the finger of God", yet Jesus' miracle was greater (as casting out demons is greater than sending gnats!)
- iv. Lessons from the plague of dog-flies.
 - 1. We see Pharaoh (a foreshadowing or 'type' of Satan) as one who makes promises but does not keep them.

2. Pharaoh promises Moses that he will allow the Israelites to depart, in order to get rid of the flies. However, after the flies depart Pharaoh reneges and goes back on his word.
3. It says “But *Pharaoh* hardened his heart at this time also.” (**Exodus 8:28**, LXX, OSB).
 - a. As we noted in a prior lesson about God hardening the heart of Pharaoh, early Christian writer Origen explained how *Pharaoh bore responsibility* for the hardening his heart.
 - b. As we mentioned in that earlier lesson, God hardens or softens the hearts of men *as the sun hardens or softens clay vs. butter*.
 - i. We decide which type of heart we want to have.
 - ii. Jesus makes a similar point in Parable of the Four Soils (also called Parable of the Sower, found in **Matthew 13**, **Mark 4** and **Luke 8**). There Jesus challenges those who desire to follow Him *to have the heart like the 4th soil* rather than like the second or third soil.
 - c. Pharaoh had free will. We do too. John Calvin and his followers are wrong on that point.
- c. **Question:** Was each of these 10 Plagues directly aimed at one or more of the various “gods” of Egypt, to teach the Egyptians a pointed lesson? (This question was raised by Elliot Nafziger, one of our younger listeners, in a discussion following the previous message.)
 - i. I have heard that claim made in the past, and while the Biblical account does not state that directly (it does not identify the corresponding Egyptian gods), a case can be made for that assertion.
 - ii. There are two places in the Law of Moses where it says that the Lord *executed vengeance on the gods of the Egyptians*:
 1. Prior to the final plague, the Passover, the Lord says to Moses: “I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute vengeance: I am the Lord.” (**Exodus 12:12**, LXX, OSB)
 2. Speaking of how the Lord had delivered Israel from the Egyptians, it says: “But the Egyptians were burying from among themselves all who died, whom the Lord struck down,

every firstborn in the Land of Egypt; and the Lord executed vengeance on their gods." (**Numbers 33:4**, LXX, OSB)

iii. Background information on the Egyptian system of gods:

1. The Egyptians had a complex religious system of belief that involved many gods (one estimate: over 1,000).
2. They had gods related to the sun, the annual Nile River inundation, health, fertility, life...you name it!
3. They venerated many different animals, including: serpents, lions, crocodiles, turtles, and scarab beetles.
 - a. Scarab beetles are colorful insects that are sometimes called 'dung beetles', based on their habit of rolling around balls of dung that they find, before depositing these 'treasures' in their burrows. Not sure why someone would want to consider this a creature *suitable for religious veneration!*
4. Some well-known gods that might have been associated with the destruction caused by the various plagues:
 - a. *Hep* or *Hapi* one of the gods associated with the annual inundation or beneficial flooding of the Nile River (1st plague = Nile River turned to blood)
 - b. *Heqet*, a frog goddess associated with fertility (2nd plague = frogs)
 - c. *Apis*, a god associated with a sacred bull with special markings that was specially maintained by priests (5th plague = cattle disease)
 - d. *Re* or *Ra*, one of the gods associated with the sun (9th plague = darkness)
5. Considering the characteristics of some of the prominent gods of the Egyptians, the idea that the plagues were specifically directed at the observances of particular Egyptian gods does not strike me as unreasonable.
 - a. Some free online resources for more information on the gods of ancient Egypt, related to the points above include:
 - i. David Padfield, *Against All the Gods of Egypt*. Bible study book with footnotes referencing multiple other resources; available online at:

https://www.padfield.com/acrobat/history/gods_of_egypt.pdf

- ii. E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, vol. 2 (published 1904)
6. However, *a contrasting view* is put forward by prominent Egyptologist and Bible scholar James K. Hoffmeier. He makes the point that unlike Hindus, the Egyptians did not consider all frogs, nor all bulls nor other specific types of animals to be sacred. For example (unlike Hindus), they ate cows and bulls. Reasoning along those lines, he concluded:
- a. “Consequently, the notion that particular animals and their corresponding deities are under attack with the various plagues must be dispelled.” (Source: Hoffmeier, James K., *Israel in Egypt*, p. 150)
- iv. Another perspective is advanced in the **Wisdom of Solomon**. Rather than seeing each of the plagues as targeting specific gods, the plagues are seen as a *general rebuke* against Egyptian idolatry and religious veneration of dumb animals. As mentioned in an earlier lesson in this series, this book is contained in the Old Testaments of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, and even was included in the King James Version of the Bible into the late 1800’s.

1. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 11:15-20**.

- a. Because the Egyptians worshiped irrational serpents and worthless animals, the Lord sent on them a multitude of animals (frogs, gnats, flies and locusts) in vengeance.
- b. **Question:** Why didn’t the Lord send bears or lions (or created some new, scary monster-type creatures) to plague the Egyptians?
 - i. **Answer:** the Lord used ordinary, “worthless animals” to teach a lesson for all: *One is punished by the things by which he sins*.
 - ii. Recall that Satan brought sin into the world *through a woman*; yet the Lord would crush him *through the offspring of a woman*, Jesus, who was born from the virgin Mary. (**Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, Galatians 4:4**)
 - iii. God has an amazing way of bringing about *appropriate justice*. It is just a matter of time.

2. Read Wisdom of Solomon 12:20-27.

- a. God punished the Egyptians with great attention and deliberation.
- b. He gave them (the Egyptians) time and opportunity to repent and depart from their evil. *Some of them* did repent.
- c. He tormented the Egyptians by means of their own abominations.
- d. God sent his judgments to mock the Egyptians for their foolishness in taking up ridiculous gods, as something foolish children would do.
- e. The Egyptians, in their suffering, became indignant at those they imagined to be gods, since they were being punished because of those 'gods'.
- f. Through this they came to recognize the true God, the Creator whom they had refused to know long ago.

3. Read Wisdom of Solomon 15:14-16:4 & 16:8-9

- a. God used common animals to make a distinction in how he treated the wicked (who worshiped idols and hated animals) vs. how he treated His people.
 - i. He punished and tormented the Egyptians through common animals like flies and locusts.
 - ii. Yet he comforted and fed His own people using other relatively common animals, quail, when the Lord's people were hungry.

III. Plagues Nos. 5 and 6: Cattle Disease, and Skin Boils and Sores

- a. Read **Exodus 9:1-12**.
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Two plagues of disease.
 - ii. 'Cattle disease' strikes all the domesticated animals of the Egyptians (including sheep, horses, donkeys and camels).
 1. However, in this plague the Lord makes a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians.

2. This should drive home the point to the Egyptians that this is personal. God has it out for them. They are the problem.
 3. While it says “all” the domesticated animals of the Egyptians died, we also see Egyptian animals suffering the consequences of the plagues that follow.
 - a. Some have suggested that “all” here refers to *all types* rather than meaning every single animal of the Egyptians.
 - b. Others have supposed that after all the Egyptian animals died, they could have purchased animals from the Israelites.
- iii. The sixth plague is festering boils. Running skin sores and blisters.
1. Moses takes a handful of ashes from a furnace and tosses it into the air, in the sight of Pharaoh.
 2. This plague strikes both man and beast.
 3. The sorcerers cannot stand before Pharaoh (whether because they are prohibited due to being unclean/diseased, or out of embarrassment).
 4. The Lord hardens Pharaoh’s heart.
- iv. These two disease-type plagues remind me of something Eusebius said regarding the **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** prophecy fulfillment, that God would raise up a prophet “like Moses”. Eusebius insisted that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy by performing signs that were *similar* to those done by Moses, yet *even greater!* Consider here:
1. Moses brought different diseases via the plagues (and subsequently removed them).
 2. However, Jesus healed “all kinds of diseases”, including skin diseases like leprosy.
 - a. “Then *He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons....*” (**Mark 1:34**, NKJV)
 - b. “And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and *to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.*” (**Matthew 10:1**, NKJV)
- c. **A few thoughts on our current ‘plague’**

- i. Last night my wife Alison asked what today's lesson would be on. I said, "More on the Ten Plagues".
- ii. She then asked, "Will you be saying anything about the *Coronavirus threat* that is now going on here and all over the world?" To which I answered, "That *never even crossed my mind*. I wasn't planning to."
- iii. Afterward, I thought a lot more about what my wife said. Ironically, I imagine that in many church settings today, where they focus on topical preaching based on current events of the week, preachers will be turning to the story of the Ten Plagues. They likely will use this story as a springboard to talking about the Coronavirus, perhaps casting it as kind of a modern equivalent.
- iv. However, *it just so happens* that in our expository teaching series we are in the midst of the 10 Plagues story this week, and even at the point of the two disease-type plagues! The background of current events is extraordinary, considering that all of the following things happened *just since last Sunday*:
 1. The World Health Organization announced that Coronavirus has been officially upgraded to a *pandemic*.
 2. Very concerning stories are being reported from overseas; especially from Italy where there has been an unexpected rapid spread and death rate from the virus.
 3. Presidential restrictions on air travel between US and Europe, etc., have been announced.
 4. People here in the U.S. are panicking. Certain items are disappearing off of store shelves. People are hoarding food and other critical items.
 5. All kinds of normal gathering have been cancelled (schools called off, colleges sending students home, churches meeting via internet, work-from-home, sports events, concerts, etc.)
 6. The news is filled with stories and rumors all about the Coronavirus, 24/7.
 7. Stock market had one of the worst weeks ever, at one point down by 20%. The market officially entered recession territory (after an 11-year bull market), with many worried that another Great Depression could be on the way. Critical supply lines from China and elsewhere have been disrupted.

8. Great fear of hospitals being overwhelmed, rapid spread of the disease, death especially to the elderly and those with compromised immune systems or with respiratory problems.
- v. The timing for this particular lesson, although unplanned, provides us with a great opportunity to look at very timely and pertinent lessons for us today.
- vi. There are basic things we can learn from the 10 Plagues account, useful in any age. (Keep in mind that the writer of **Wisdom of Solomon** had a lot to teach the people of his own day from the story of the 10 Plagues, despite the fact that his account was likely written about 1,000 years after Moses.)
 1. The Lord can and does attack the idols and false gods of a people. He has made a mockery of the worthless things they put their trust in. The idols of today include:
 - a. Money. (Staggering loss of wealth in the security of my generation, the stock market and 401(k) retirement accounts)
 - b. Sports. (NHL, college basketball “March Madness”, Major League Baseball season opening, Boston Marathon...postponed or cancelled)
 - c. Entertainment and Comfort. (concerts, Disneyland, plane trips, vacations, eating out in restaurants...cancelled)
 - d. Celebrities. (Several are now reporting themselves to be on self-quarantine; even top political leaders worldwide are not safe)
 - e. It seems that practically anything people put their security, or derive pride from, has been rocked in the past week, in an extraordinary way.
 - i. In the Boston area, prestigious universities like Harvard and MIT have been shut down.
 - ii. Even our world-class health care systems and hospitals, which provide security to many, are in danger of being overwhelmed.
 - f. **Take Away:** Before we look down on the idoltry of the Egyptian culture, *let us first take stock of the idolatry that has a stranglehold in our own society* (worshiping lifeless things instead of the Lord).

2. The Lord *cares about everyone*; even those who have put their trust in these foolish things. He can bring extreme challenges like plagues to try to *wake up people* spiritually.
 - a. He brings challenges to lead the good-hearted to repent.
 - b. Some of them *will* repent.
3. The Lord brings plagues so that *all* may know: “*I am the LORD.*”
4. The righteous will put their confidence in the Lord, not in the idols of this world.
 - a. Let us pray, “Give us today our daily bread” and “Deliver us from the evil one”, as Jesus taught. (**Luke 11:2-4**)
 - b. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.” (**Colossians 3:1-7**, NKJV)
 - c. In view of the recent financial challenges which have disturbed many, let us consider the admonition of Paul to Timothy.
 - i. “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,” (**1 Timothy 6:17-18**, NKJV)
 - d. We will close with a great reminder from Jesus.
 - i. Read **Luke 12:13-34**.
 - ii. Don’t put your faith and confidence in this life, in accumulated wealth. Our life and our wealth can be taken away *in one night*.
 - iii. We need to be rich toward God, not toward ourselves.

- iv. Don't have an anxious mind like the world around us.
- v. Let us seek the kingdom of God first, and take care of others who are struggling around us.