

TUTORIAL
1.27

The Lord sent plagues on the Egyptians

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: ***Exodus 5:1-18, 6:1-8, Exodus 7-12.***

Last time

The Egyptian Pharaoh had become concerned about the Israelite ethnic community which had grown dramatically in numbers, wealth and influence. They were enslaved, mistreated terribly and their firstborn sons were killed. One baby was saved by Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her son, Moses. As an adult he fled possible retribution after he'd killed an Egyptian. Many years later, God appeared to him in the burning bush and sent Moses and Aaron, his brother, to Egypt to lead His people out of their bondage.

Pharaoh flatly denies a request

Having first of all convinced the Israelite community that God has appointed them, Moses and Aaron now go to speak to Pharaoh. (Exodus 5:1-4) They pass on a message from the God of Israel, "Let my people go so they can hold a festival in my honour in the wilderness." The King is dismissive, "Oh yeah, sure! I don't know this Lord, why should I listen to Him. There's no way I'm going to let the Israelite people go." Moses and Aaron persist, but their request is flatly denied. In fact, Pharaoh's response is to make life even tougher for the Israelites...now they were still expected to reach their work quotas, but they had to find their own raw materials.

This arrogant ruler had no interest in knowing about, much less submitting to, the God of the subjugated Hebrew people. Revered as a deity in life, as he would be in death, head of the civil administration, supreme warlord and chief priest of the kingdom, he lived at the very pinnacle of his world. He presided over a society that had long before turned away from God's true Story and accepted a range of creation myths of their own invention. Sadly, none of their truly amazing architectural and artistic achievements were done with the guidance, or in honour, of God. Their assurance in their own abilities, their confidence in their own versions of how to cope with life and death, and their

disinterest in God's truth even when it was readily accessible to them, are all startlingly similar to our own culture.

God achieves His purposes regardless of human response

Because of who He is, because He's always looking for opportunities to show grace and mercy, God would have gladly responded to Pharaoh and his people if they'd been willing to listen and recognise their need for Him. But when that's not the case, like here when the Egyptian ruler responds with arrogant dismissiveness, God isn't perplexed or caught off guard. In fact, it is clear from the Narrative – Exodus 7:4-5 and 9:16 point this out – that God knew full well, at every juncture, what Pharaoh's responses were going to be. So He doesn't manipulate or force peoples' reactions – remember that creating humans in His image involved giving us real freedom to make choices – but whatever the response (humble & repentant or proud and rebellious), He is always well prepared to use it as an opportunity to reveal himself.

So now God tells Moses that by the time He's done with Pharaoh he'll not only let the people go, he will actually "force them to leave his land." (Exodus 6:1-8) God is going to use this arrogant, stubborn king to demonstrate His power and to prove to His chosen people, the Israelites, that He is their God. He doesn't want their knowledge of Him to be a purely factual account of His interaction with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...nor for their relationship to be reduced to dry religious activities. He wants this generation of his chosen people to know him *themselves*. Yes, to be familiar with the history of His interaction with their forefathers, but He wants to show who He is in the cut and thrust of real life events, as He frees *them* from bondage, responds to *their* very pressing needs, and provides what He knows they need most.

God demonstrates His power through 9 plagues

The Narrative (Exodus Ch. 7-10) now details 9 plagues that God inflicted on the Egyptian people. The impact of what some have dismissed as "natural" disasters, each coming on the heels of the other in quick succession, is difficult to imagine. It must have been completely devastating as the Nile river turned to blood, quickly to be followed by a plague of frogs, then swarms of gnats and biting flies. Next a disease wiped out Egyptian livestock in great numbers. After this came an epidemic of boils, then an enormously destructive hailstorm, a plague of locusts and finally 3 days of total darkness.

God was demonstrating His power in contrast to the impotence of the gods of Egyptian belief... the Nile and all the river deities, Akhor god of the earth, Apis the sacred bull god, Ra the sun-god, and numerous others were clearly unable to protect the Egyptians against the devastating power of the God of the Israelites, the One true Creator. This message was highlighted by the fact that

the Israelite community was spared from the plagues. God was showing His love and mercy to them, and reaffirming that they were truly His chosen people. As each new plague or traumatic event gripped the Egyptian communities, Pharaoh would agree to let the Israelites go. When the situation would begin to ease, he'd become defiant and reverse his decision. Finally, after the last plague of intense darkness, Pharaoh says he'll kill Moses if he comes again to ask for the release of the Israelites. Something has to give.

God brings death while providing a way of escape

The Lord tells Moses He's going to strike one final blow against Egypt, after which Pharaoh will be eager for the Israelites to leave the country. The firstborn son of every Egyptian family, God says, from the throne down to the lowest peasants, will die. (Exodus 11:1-7) But this time, rather than automatically shielding the Israelites, God gives instructions they are to follow precisely if they're to avoid calamity. As always, His intention was to communicate, to reveal, to instruct...for them in their time but also for all who would hear and read this Narrative in the future.

They were to choose a flawless lamb or young goat, without deformity or injury – a reflection of God's own perfect, righteous standards. (Exodus Ch. 12) Then, at a designated date they were to kill the lamb...as usual, its life-blood was to flow completely out – a striking picture of the death their sin-debt had incurred and so that animal could die in place of their firstborn children. The parallel with Isaac and the substitute ram provided by God is obvious. An instruction is added by God that, on the surface, seems of little importance but which will prove to have real significance later in the Narrative – He says that the bones of the animal are not to be broken as it's killed or later eaten.

The Israelite families were to smear some of the blood on the sides and top of the doorframes of that house. Then, having eaten a meal that included the meat of the lamb or goat, they were to stay inside the house with the blood marks on the doorframe. God promises (Exodus 12:12-13) that when He's going through the land of Egypt taking the life of the firstborn children and animals, demonstrating that He, not the Egyptian false gods are in control... during this night of terrible death, He will take no life in the houses where He sees the blood on the doorposts. The blood would serve as a mark, as evidence, that death had already come. As always, the way of escape was only by His provision, according to His specifications, aligned with who He is. Any efforts of their own, no matter how sincere, devout, even painful or costly, will not suffice. They are in no position to argue or attempt some other means of escape. The situation is urgent, desperate. It's life or death. And the Israelites recognised the realities of the situation. They believed God and followed His instructions implicitly. And they were able to hide, as it were, behind the safety of the blood with all it represented. (Exodus 12:28-30)

The Egyptians of course were defenseless. Their arrogant defiance, the stories they'd told themselves, the belief system they'd developed, the gods they'd imagined...none of it protected them against God's righteous judgment. On the doors of their houses there was no blood, nothing to indicate that substitutionary death had taken place. And so at midnight, the Narrative says God struck down the firstborn sons of Egypt, from the Pharaoh's household, right down to the sons of prisoners in the dungeons. As each family discovered their dead the sound of dreadful mourning could be heard rising up from one house and then another throughout their community.

Pharaoh tells the Israelites to go

Pharaoh has finally had enough. (Exodus 12:31-33) He sends for Aaron and Moses and tells them to take their fellow Israelites and leave his country. And the Egyptians were so eager to have them leave that they gladly handed over large amounts of their wealth, including silver and gold. God had fulfilled His promises, to Moses and His people. And His prophecy to Abraham hundreds of years before had proved to be entirely true as well...even in the details that His people would come away with great wealth after the enslaving nation had been punished.



DISCUSSION POINTS

The Lord sent plagues on the Egyptians

1. As the lesson notes, ancient Egypt had rejected the true Creator God. In light of that, draw any parallels you can between that civilization and our own, keeping in mind the remarkable achievements of both. Are there observations to be made from this about what it means for humans to have been created in God's image despite our fallen condition?
2. As the lesson explains, God used the plagues to reveal Himself and demonstrate His total superiority over the gods of the Egyptians' beliefs. Describe briefly what you can of a worldview system significantly different from that of our majority culture (do some study if necessary). Then, in outline form, describe how you would attempt to share

about God with someone who held those beliefs.

3. What is your personal response to the fact that God protected the Israelites from the terrible results of the plagues? Note some other instances in the Biblical narrative so far that stand out as examples of God's grace. Think of some ways that the word or idea of grace is used in our society that falls short or is entirely different from the grace we see in God's dealings with people.