

“AGAINST ALL THE GODS OF EGYPT”

INTRODUCTION

A. Acts 7:2-34

In his final sermon before being martyred, Stephen summarized hundreds of years of Israelite history.

1. It was God’s plan, long before Egypt enslaved Israel, to judge Egypt (7).
2. Our reading shows that Moses was chosen by God to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage (34).

B. Exodus 3:19-20

God knew ahead of time that Pharaoh would resist. Thus, God would strike Egypt with His wonders.

C. Exodus 4:21-23

God also knew that the Egyptian king’s heart would harden against God’s effort to release the Israelites. The Lord described Israel as His firstborn and asserted that if Pharaoh refused to send out God’s firstborn, then God would kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son.

D. Exodus 5:1-2

Pharaoh’s own words say more than any commentary can offer: *“I do not know the Lord”*.

E. Exodus 7:1-13

God intended to bring *“the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by great judgments”* (4). In so doing, the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord (5).

F. Exodus 12:12

Looking ahead, we see that by the final plague, God explained that He would *“execute judgment” “against all the gods of Egypt”*.

I. “THE WATERS... TURNED TO BLOOD”

A. Exodus 7:14-20

By this wonder, the God of heaven defeated the following gods of Egypt:

1. Khnum, the guardian of the source of the Nile, who was often depicted as a Ram-headed man pouring water from a jar, was powerless against the Lord.
2. Hapy, the deification of the Nile's annual inundation, which irrigated the farmlands, was brought to nothing. This so-called "Lord of the fishes and birds of the marshes and Lord of the River bringing vegetation" was often depicted as a blue skinned man to represent the water. Where was he when *"the fish that were in the river died"* (18, 21)?
3. The Nile was thought to be the very **bloodstream** of Osiris, god of the underworld. How ironic that God literally transformed these waters into blood. He could have dried them up or frozen them or transformed them into wine, but instead He killed their god of the dead before their very eyes.

B. Exodus 7:21, 24-25

1. For the duration of this plague, seven days (25), the Egyptians had no fresh fish to eat (21), and had to dig for water to drink (24).
2. The Egyptians used to sing a "Hymn of the Nile" which included these lyrics: "Thou art the Lord of the poor and the needy. If thou wert overthrown in the heavens the gods would fall upon their faces and men would perish". How very true.

C. Exodus 7:22-23

Notice how helpful the magicians were. Instead of providing water to the desperate people of Egypt, their solution was turning more water to blood! They could do nothing to overturn the wonder God had performed. Even so, the heart of the king was unmoved.

II. "FROGS CAME UP AND COVERED THE LAND OF EGYPT"

A. Exodus 8:1-6

1. Hekt was the Egyptian goddess of life and birth, represented as having the head of a frog. She was the patron deity of mid-wives and was thought to breathe the breath of life into the nostrils of newborn babies. How ironic that the symbol of this fertility goddess would make its way into Pharaoh's own bed (3)!
2. That God would empower His servants Moses and Aaron to summon frogs from the river to overtake the land of Egypt (5-6) proved that the frog-headed goddess Hekt was no god at all.
3. Frogs were considered sacred because they would spawn in the puddles and ponds left behind by the annual flooding of the Nile, which in turn irrigated the farmlands of Egypt. An abundance of croaking frogs meant plenty of water, and therefore a bountiful harvest. These creatures were so revered that even the involuntary slaughter of a frog was punishable by death, yet during the plague, when they were literally on the people (3), they could not have avoided stepping on them, and hiding in their ovens (3), they would have been accidentally roasted.

B. Exodus 8:7

Once again, the magicians were powerless to stop the plague. They could only duplicate what was already a disaster.

C. Exodus 8:8

That Pharaoh would beg for the extermination of such a cherished animal proves the effectiveness of the plague.

D. Exodus 8:9-13

Frogs came forth in abundance every year following the inundation of the Nile, so some might conclude this second plague was merely incidental, with Moses claiming a normal, natural occurrence as the power of God. Notice,

however, that it came to a conclusion on command! Pharaoh was provided the honor of deciding when the plague would stop and God made it so.

E. Exodus 8:14

Heaps of dead frogs nationwide would have left little confidence in them as gods. Instead of breathing life as the goddess of birth, the symbol of Hekt, the goddess of life, was decaying and filling the land with its stench.

F. Exodus 8:15

Like so many who would turn to God in prayer, begging for relief from some affliction, Pharaoh soon forgot the powerful lesson God had taught him.

III. "ALL THE DUST OF THE LAND BECAME LICE THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT"

A. Exodus 8:16-17

1. Notice that it was the dust of the land that became lice. Even in modern times, there are reports of certain insect outbreaks so severe that the sand appears alive and moving due to the activity of the pests at the surface.
2. Here God struck Geb, the great god of the earth, who should have protected the land from becoming lice.
3. This plague incapacitated the priests of Egypt, whose religious rituals would be delayed by ceremonial impurity because of their inevitable contact with these pests. In order to remain pure, Egyptian priests shaved all their body hair every other day – including eyebrows and lashes, they wore only one tunic, and bathed twice each morning and twice each night. Yet all this would be useless when *"the dust of the earth... became lice on man"*. Thus, the totality of the Egyptian religion was stalled by this plague.

B. Exodus 8:18-19

1. The magicians still worked their enchantments to reproduce, rather than counteract, this horrible plague. This time, though, they couldn't even do that!
2. The magicians themselves were convinced this plague was the very "*finger of God*". A comment regarding the finger of a god evoked references to Egyptian mythology. They spoke of the "*finger of Seth*" or the "*finger of Thoth*" the way we might refer, even on insurance forms, to "*an act of God*".
3. Still, Pharaoh's heart was hard.

IV. "THICK SWARMS... CAME INTO... ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT"

A. **Exodus 8:20-21, 24**

The word "flies" is not present in the original text, only "*swarms*".

1. It could have been swarms of anything, perhaps even the scarab, the dung beetle deified as Amon-Ra, regarded as the creator and king of the gods.
2. Of course, the word translated "*swarms*" literally means "*mixtures*", or as the KJV puts it "*divers sorts*". Thus, a combination of various fly species could have been included, such as dog flies, horse flies, and bird flies. Bird flies were honored in the Egyptian Book of the Dead as supposedly being able to bring a man to heaven.
3. Regardless of what these swarms consisted of, the Egyptians deified nearly everything. There is little doubt that some creature they cherished as a god invaded, then destroyed, their land.

B. **Exodus 8:22-23**

Notice that Goshen, the land where Israel dwelt, was untouched. A selective plague like this can hardly be attributed to normal occurrence.

C. **Exodus 8:25-32**

This plague cannot be attributed to natural causes in that when God decreed its end *“not one remained”* (31).

V. “ALL THE LIVESTOCK OF EGYPT DIED”

A. Exodus 9:1-3, 5-6

1. The goddess Hathor was pictured as a cow, giving Pharaoh divine milk to drink. If the cattle perished, Hathor died, too. As the deity of love, joy, and beauty, her downfall meant the end of all of Egypt’s glory, not to mention the end of Pharaoh’s divine sustenance.
2. A live bull, known as the Apis bull, which was cared for just as if it was a god, symbolized Ptah, considered the creator god. The bull was given special food, bathed and brushed daily, and was dressed in special clothes. When one died, it was mummified and buried just like a pharaoh. There is a tomb in Egypt with nothing but the burial chambers of these Apis bulls. When one died, the priests would search the entire land to find a calf that met the qualifications of the Apis bull. With the death of the cattle, there were no replacements available for the Apis, and thus the Egyptian creator god Ptah was overthrown.
3. Livestock were used for religious sacrifice. Diseased animals were not acceptable. Thus, sacrifices could not be offered, further inhibiting service to the gods of Egypt.
4. Livestock were used for calculating wealth. The pestilence must have devastated the Egyptian economy.
5. Livestock were used for transporting heavy loads. Without them, burdens would be carried by man or would not be moved at all.

B. Exodus 9:4, 7

Once again, God sent a selective plague, one which ruined Egypt, but left the land of Goshen, the habitation of Israel, untouched.

VI. “BOILS WERE ON... ALL THE EGYPTIANS”

A. **Exodus 9:8-12**

The Egyptians worshiped their god Typhon with the sacrifices of red bulls, and occasionally even humans. Priests would throw the ashes from these sacrifices into the air, believing that any Egyptian the ashes landed on would be kept safe from defilement. Moses didn't need ashes from the altar of Typhon, just common ashes from a furnace, and these ashes protected no Egyptian. Instead, they were all defiled.

B. **Deuteronomy 28:15, 27**

This painful plague was an affront to Imhotep, the Egyptian god of medicine. Imhotep was a real man who served under as many as four ancient Pharaohs in the capacity of, among other things, architect of the first pyramid, scribe, poet, priest, astrologer, and physician. He is believed to have authored some of, if not the, earliest medical texts in history, having diagnosed and treated hundreds of diseases. His prominence was so respected that future generations elevated him to divine status. Yet, this god of medicine was powerless against the plague.

VII. “THE LORD RAINED HAIL ON THE LAND OF EGYPT”

A. **Exodus 9:13-25**

1. To the ancient Egyptians, Nut was the personification of the sky, depicted as a dark, star-covered naked woman, holding her body up in an arch, facing downwards. Yet, this goddess of the heavens was powerless against the God of Israel when He sent hail, thunder, and lightning from heaven and desecrated Egypt.
2. As the mother of several other Egyptian deities – Osiris, Hathor, Set, Isis, and Nephthys – the overthrow of Nut also represented God's judgment against these other gods.

3. Seth was the god of storms. Why didn't he prevent this storm which was unlike any other ever seen (18, 24)?

B. Exodus 9:25; Psalm 78:47; 105:32-33

Notice the destruction of trees in Egypt, which were already a limited commodity in that desert land. Several among the Egyptian pantheon were associated with trees.

1. Horus was associated with the acacia.
2. Osiris was connected with the willow.
3. Ra was tied with the sycamore.
4. Wepwawet, an underworld deity portrayed as a jackal headed man, was associated with the tamarisk.
5. Thoth and Seshat, patron gods to scribes, were associated with the leaves of the ished tree.

C. Exodus 9:31-32

1. Isis was known as "the lady of green crops" as well as "the green goddess", but fields burned nonetheless so that the flax and barley crops were destroyed.
2. Flax was used to make linen, which was used for the priest's clothing. They were permitted to wear nothing else. Yet again the Egyptian priesthood would falter.
3. Also, mummification required hundreds of yards of linen. Without it, bodies could not be properly buried. Their hope in the afterlife would be affected by this. Later, when the firstborn in every house was killed, the shortage of linen would have devastated the funerary protocol of their society.

D. Exodus 9:26

Once again, the people of Israel were untouched.

E. Exodus 9:27-30, 33-35

Notice that Pharaoh described what took place as the very “*sounds of God*” (28). He had no choice but to attribute what he had witnessed to divine action.

VIII. “LOCUSTS WENT UP OVER ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT”

A. **Exodus 10:1-20**

1. Where was Isis, the green goddess, when these crops were consumed by the locusts?
2. The gaze of the goddess Renenutet, who appeared as a cobra, was credited with granting great abundance to crops. Harvest festivals were held in her honor, during which the best yields were dedicated to her. Why didn’t she prevent this from happening?
3. Geb, the god of the earth, was portrayed as a green man with plants sprouting from his body. God sent the locusts to eat Geb.
4. Remember Osiris, god of the dead? He was also the patron god of agriculture. Like Geb, he was pictured as having green skin. The locusts from God ate Osiris, too.
5. Min was another agriculture god, as well as a male fertility god. Coselettuce was regarded as an aphrodisiac by the Egyptians and it was used to symbolize Min. Pharaohs were sometimes depicted ceremonially hoeing the ground and watering the fields under the supervision of Min. Min could not protect the lettuce or any other crop when God was determined to destroy it.

B. **Exodus 10:5-6, 14-15**

Notice the severity of this plague.

1. The face of the earth could not be seen for the number of them (5). The land was darkened as a result (15).
2. None of the Egyptians’ ancestors had ever seen such a thing (6), nor would any of their descendants (14).

3. Houses were filled with the pests (6).
4. The very residue of what was left after the destruction from the hail was consumed by these locusts (5). Even Pharaoh's advisors begged him to capitulate for they knew Egypt was already destroyed by the hail (7). Total devastation was the final outcome (15).

IX. "THERE WAS THICK DARKNESS IN ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT"

A. Exodus 10:21-29

1. Their greatest god, Ra, the god of the sun, was thought to make a daily voyage across the sky in a grand, heavenly boat. Why was their great god hiding for three days?
2. Khepera was a manifestation of Ra, depicted as a man with the head of a scarab, the dung beetle. As the scarab would roll a ball of dung in front of it, so Khepera was pictured as rolling the sun through the sky. He was known specifically as the god of the rising sun. Where was Khepera those three dark days?
3. Horus, the king of the gods of the earth was also the god of light, but he was powerless. Incidentally, each Pharaoh was regarded as an incarnation of Horus. Thus, the king was here reduced to impotence.
4. Atum was another sun god; Khonsu was the moon god; and Ptah was credited with creating them both. All of them were defeated by the God.
5. Shu was the god of the air. Remember, this darkness could be felt (21).

B. Exodus 10:23

No natural occurrence can account for three days of darkness. No solar eclipse has ever lasted so long. Yet, there was light in the houses of the Israelites. How can that be explained except as a miracle?

X. "THE LORD STRUCK ALL THE FIRSTBORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT"

A. Exodus 11:1-12:36

1. The aforementioned Renenutet was also the guardian of children, but she could not protect the firstborn throughout Egypt.
2. Nekhbet, who appeared as a vulture headed woman, was the patron of the sovereignty of Pharaoh. Her role especially included protecting the king while an infant, yet she could not stop God from killing Pharaoh's firstborn, who would have been his successor on the throne.
3. This plague was highly selective in nature. Not only did it spare obedient Israel, but killed **only** the firstborn among Egyptian people and cattle. It cannot be explained away as some childhood epidemic as it included adults.

B. Exodus 4:21-23

It came to pass just as God had forewarned before any of the plagues befell Egypt.

C. Psalm 135:1-9

This single plague is certainly the most memorable. It could be recounted generations later as a representation of all the wonders with which God struck Egypt.

D. Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16

The power of Almighty God would be remembered in this one plague. Shortly afterward, the Lord ordered that all the firstborn of Israel be consecrated to Him.

E. Number 33:1-4

The death of the firstborn finally left Pharaoh without recourse. He could not renege on his agreement to release Israel this time because he was too occupied burying his own son, along with the rest of Egypt.

CONCLUSION

A. Exodus 12:12

The Almighty God did indeed “execute judgment” *“against all the gods of Egypt”*, which leaves us to wonder: Where was Sobek, represented as a crocodile headed man with a feathered crown, who functioned as the guardian of the gods and of Pharaoh himself? The very fact that God overthrew all of Egypt’s gods means that God overthrew their bodyguard, too.

G. Exodus 18:10-11

Following the exodus, Moses’ father-in-law Jethro came to believe in the true God, observing *“that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them”*. Each of the plagues that struck Egypt proved the futility of their idolatry.

B. Psalm 78:42b-52; 105:26-38

God was powerful against Egypt and powerful in favor toward His chosen people Israel.

C. Psalm 136:1-3, 10-15, 23-26

His strength deserves our praise!

D. Deuteronomy 4:34-35; 10:12-14, 17; 1st Corinthians 8:5-6

The greatness of our God is incomparable. He is the God of gods, Lord of lords, and no god of human imagination can withstand our God.