

issues in their conflict with Pharaoh.

Note that Aaron is mentioned first in 6:26 and Moses first in 6:27. Probably no great significance can be attached to this.

Note also the third-person writing in Ex. 6:26-27. This style does not eliminate the possibility that Moses himself wrote Exodus. Egyptian writings by the Pharaohs about themselves and by themselves are often written in third person. So also are Biblical writings. Note Ezra 7:10 (compare 8:15) and John 19:35 as examples.

29. *Whose words would Moses (and Aaron) speak? (6:28-29)*

God's words. "Speak . . . all that I speak unto thee." Compare 7:2. God's servants need not fear or wonder what they should speak. Speak words God has given us.

30. *What reassurance did God give Moses? (6:28-29)*

God told him, I am Jehovah! See notes on 3:14-15 and 6:3 for information about the meaning and power in the name Jehovah.

Regarding Moses' statement about "uncircumcised lips," see notes on 6:12.

31. *Where does the paragraph beginning at 6:28 extend to?*

It extends on through 7:7. It is unfortunate that the chapter division was placed where it is. 7:1-7 continues God's reassurance to Moses, telling how He will harden Pharaoh's heart, and work wonders in Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel.

The Text of EXODUS

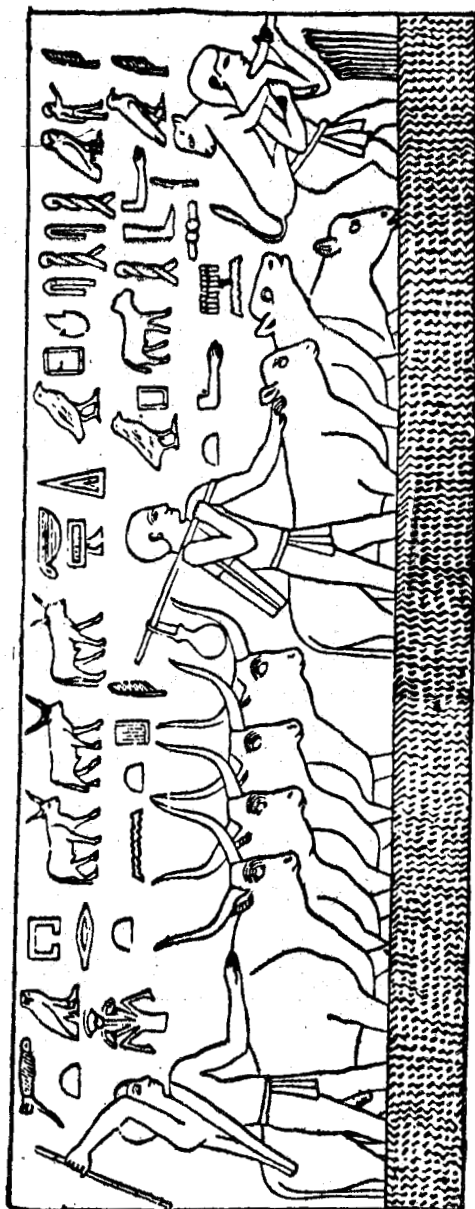
TRANSLATION

7 And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses. See, I have made thee as God to Pha-raoh; and Aar-on thy brother shall be thy prophet. (2) Thou shalt speak all that I command thee; and Aar-on thy brother shall speak unto Pha-raoh, that he let the children of Is-ra-el go out of his land. (3) And I will harden



(Upper) The author at Beersheba with mud bricks made with straw. The bricks the Israelites made in Egypt were similar to these. These bricks were made for restoration and preservation of archaeological remains.

(Lower) The Sphinx in Egypt. It has a lion-shaped body, and a head representing king Khephren (about 2500 B.C.), the builder of the second great pyramid. An inscription standing between its forelegs tells of a later Pharaoh (Thutmose IV) who cleaned away deep sand from the Sphinx and later became king.



A Herd in the Old Kingdom, Fording a Canal. (From J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, p. 93.)

Pha-raoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of E-gypt. (4) But Pha-raoh will not hearken unto you, and I will lay my hand upon E-gypt, and bring forth my hosts, my people the children of Is-ra-el, out of the land of E-gypt by great judgments. (5) And the E-gyp-tians shall know that I am Je-ho-vah, when I stretch forth my hand upon E-gypt, and bring out the children of Is-ra-el from among them. (6) And Mo-ses and Aar-on did so; as Je-ho-vah commanded them, so did they. (7) And Mo-ses was fourscore years old, and Aar-on fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto Pha-raoh.

(8) And Je-ho-vah spake unto Mo-ses and unto Aar-on, saying, (9) When Pha-raoh shall speak unto you, saying, Show a wonder for you; then thou shalt say unto Aar-on, Take thy rod, and cast it down before Pha-raoh, that it become a serpent. (10) And Mo-ses and Aar-on went in unto Pha-raoh, and they did so, as Je-ho-vah had commanded: and Aar-on cast down his rod before Pha-raoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. (11) Then Pha-raoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers: and they also, the magicians of E-gypt, did in like manner with their enchantments. (12) For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aar-on's rod swallowed up their rods. (13) And Pha-raoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as Je-ho-vah had spoken.

(14) And Je-ho-vah said unto Mo-ses, Pha-raoh's heart is stubborn, he refuseth to let the people go. (15) Get thee unto Pha-raoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thy hand. (16) And thou shalt say unto him, Je-ho-vah, the God of the Hebrews, hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou hast not hearkened. (17) Thus saith Je-ho-vah, In this thou shalt know that I am Je-ho-vah: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in my hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. (18) And the fish that are in the river shall die, and the river shall become foul; and the E-gyp-tians shall loathe to drink water from the river. (19) And Je-ho-vah said

unto Mo-ses, Say unto Aar-on, Take thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the waters of E-gypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their ponds of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of E-gypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.

(20) And Mo-ses and Aar-on did so, as Je-ho-vah commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pha-raoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. (21) And the fish that were in the river died; and the river became foul, and the E-gyp-tains could not drink water from the river; and the blood was throughout all the land of E-gypt. (22) And the magicians of E-gypt did in like manner with their enchantments: and Pha-raoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as Je-ho-vah had spoken. (23) And Pha-raoh turned and went into his house, neither did he lay even this to heart. (24) And all the E-gyp-tians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river. (25) And seven days were fulfilled, after that Je-ho-vah had smitten the river.

EXPLORING EXODUS: CHAPTER SEVEN
QUESTIONS ANSWERABLE FROM THE BIBLE

1. After careful reading, propose a brief topic or theme for the entire chapter.
2. Which chapters in Exodus deal with the ten plagues?
3. What had God made Moses unto Pharaoh? (7:1)
4. What position did Aaron bear unto Moses? (7:1)
5. What demand were Moses and Aaron to make unto Pharaoh? (7:2)
6. What would God do to Pharaoh? (7:3)
7. What would God multiply in the land of Egypt? (7:3)
8. What was God going to lay upon Egypt? For what purpose? (7:4)

9. By what terms are the Israelites described in 7:4?
10. What would the Egyptians learn to know about God? What would cause them to know this? (7:5)
11. How old were Moses and Aaron when they spake unto Pharaoh? (7:7)
12. What miracle were Moses and Aaron to do? (7:9-10)
13. What did the magicians of Egypt do after Moses' rod became a serpent? (7:11-12)
14. What miracles did the magicians of Egypt duplicate? (7:11-12, 22; 8:7, 18)
15. Name the Egyptian magicians. (II Tim. 3:8)
16. What effect upon Pharaoh's heart did the rod-to-serpent miracle have? (7:13)
17. At what place was Moses told to go to meet Pharaoh? (7:15)
18. What was Moses to take with him when he met Pharaoh? (7:15)
19. How would Pharaoh come to know that God was the LORD (Jehovah)? (7:17)
20. What results would occur because of the change in the Nile waters? (7:18, 21)
21. What waters would be affected? (7:19)
22. Did Pharaoh witness the changing of the waters? (7:20)
23. How far-reaching in area was the change in the waters? (7:21)
24. Who duplicated the water miracle? (7:22)
25. What was the condition of Pharaoh's heart after the water was changed? (7:22)
26. Where did Pharaoh go after this miracle? (7:23)
27. How did the Egyptians try to obtain good water? (7:24)
28. How long did the Nile-to-blood plague last? (7:25)

EXODUS SEVEN: THE CONFLICT BEGINS!

- I. The command; 7:1-7.
- II. The confrontation; 7:8-13.
- III. The calamity; 7:14-21.

IV. The counterattack; 7:22-25.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MEN (7:1-2)

1. Relationships are assigned by God; 7:1.
2. Relationships are needed to serve mankind; 7:2.

PHARAOH: THE TYPE OF STUBBORN SINNERS (7:3-5)

- I. Rejects the divine command; (7:3-4)
- II. Receives the divine punishments; (7:4)
- III. Ruins others by his wickedness; (7:5)

THE COUNTERFEITS OF SATAN (7:8-12, 22-23)

("Anything you can do, I can do better!")

- I. Imitations of God's works; (7:8-10, 22)
- II. Inferior to God's works; (7:11-12)
- III. Inspire evil men to more evil; (7:13, 22)

MAN'S RICHEST RESOURCES RUINED! (7:14-25)

- I. Ruin caused by stubbornness; (7:14)
- II. Ruin comes to the mightiest; (7:15-16)
- III. Ruin contains God's lesson; (7:16-17)
- IV. Ruin crunches our resources; (7:18-21, 24)
- V. Ruin cannot always bring repentance; (7:23)

EXPLORING EXODUS: NOTES ON CHAPTER SEVEN

1. *What is in Exodus chapter seven?*

The conclusion of God's charge to Moses to go back to Pharaoh extends to 7:7. It started back at 6:28.

The story of Moses and Aaron's second encounter with Pharaoh is in 7:8-13. At this encounter the miracle of the rod changing to a serpent (or crocodile) was displayed.

The story of the first plague, the river-to-blood disaster, is in 7:14-25.

We entitle this chapter *The Conflict* (or contest) *Begins!*

The conflict we refer to is the battle between God and Pharaoh. The battle consisted of the ten plagues, and Jehovah God won the conflict. The stories of the ten plagues are found in Exodus chapters 7-12.

2. *What relationship would Moses have toward Pharaoh? (7:1)*

He would be as God to Pharaoh, with divine power and authority over him. He could barge into Pharaoh's throne room without an appointment and not be arrested. He would work miracles, like God, He would speak the divine message.

Moses had been fearful of confronting Pharaoh (6:30), but he had no cause for fear.

3. *What relationship would Aaron be to Moses? (7:1)*

He would be Moses' prophet, or spokesman. As the prophets spoke God's message, so Aaron would speak Moses' message. Note 4:16, where we are told that Moses would be as *God* to Aaron.

4. *What was Moses to say unto Aaron? (7:2)*

"All that I (Jehovah) command thee." It is necessary that God's men speak the whole counsel of God (Acts 20-27). Our leaving out some of God's words may be worse than our saying some wrong things.

5. *What would God do when Aaron spoke to Pharaoh? (7:3)*

Two things: (1) he would harden Pharaoh's heart; and (2) multiply his signs (miracles with a meaning) and wonders in the land of Egypt. Compare Exodus 11:9. It is simply a wrong view of God's nature to think that He is so loving and indulgent that he will never "rub it in" to those who defy Him.

Also it is a wrong view of God to think that He is not jealous of His own honor. Jehovah was determined to teach Pharaoh the truth about Jehovah; and this He would do by inflicting the plague-wonders on Egypt.

6. *What are the "great judgments" by which God would bring Israel out? (7:4)*

They are the ten plagues of Exodus 7-12. The word *judgments* here refers to acts of punishment. Compare Ex. 6:6. These judgments redeemed Israel and punished Egypt.

Ramm correctly asserts that modern man seeks to omit real judgment on the part of God, while still preserving the love of God.¹ But love in that case ceases to be *holy* love, and disappears into sentiment and sentimentality. We add further that it is a false analysis of God's real nature.

7. *With what organization would Israel leave Egypt? (7:4)*

As "hosts," or armies. Israel left Egypt organized as an army, with its tribes as different divisions (Ex. 12:51; Num. 1, 2). Their organization was not very strong; nor were they well-equipped. But they were not without some force.

8. *What would Egypt learn by Israel's deliverance? (7:5)*

That God was Jehovah! See notes on 6:2-3. The statement "I am Jehovah" carries with it a depth of meaning that few modern readers grasp. The Egyptians would learn that Jehovah is the existing one, the eternal, the ultimate causer. They would learn that their bag of gods was a fiction! See 7:17; 8:10, 22; 14:4, 18.

9. *What were Moses' and Aaron's ages at this momentous time? (7:7)*

Moses, eighty; Aaron, eighty-three. Moses had been about forty when he went out to help Israel (Acts 7:23). He was 120 at his death (Deut. 31:2). Thus Moses' life is divided into three nearly equal parts:

- (1) 40 yrs. in Egypt as a prince (thinking he was somebody);
- (2) 40 yrs. in Midian as a shepherd (finding out he was a nobody);
- (3) 40 yrs. in the desert as leader of Israel (learning what God can do with a somebody who realized he was a nobody).²

10. *What miracle was Moses to do in Pharaoh's presence? (7:8-9)*

Change his rod to become a serpent. Of the three miracles given to Moses to do (in 4:1-9), only the rod-to-serpent miracle was done before Pharaoh. The water-to-blood sign

¹Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal, 1974), p. 54.

²Attributed to D. L. Moody. Quoted in Ramm, *Ibid.*

became the first of the ten plagues. The leprosy sign is not referred to after it was shown to Moses. Certainly Moses' miracles set him forth as God to Pharaoh.

The *serpent* referred to in 7:9 is (in Hebrew) a *tannin*, meaning a large reptile, sea or river monster. Jewish commentators rendered it as *crocodile*. The Hebrew word for serpent in 4:3 is *nahash*, meaning a serpent or snake.

We have no strong reasons for doubting that Aaron's rod became a *crocodile* in the presence of Pharaoh, rather than a serpent. Certainly that would be an even more impressive miracle than changing it to a serpent. The only real objection to this idea is that it differs from the previous rod-to-serpent miracle shown to the Israelites (4:30). However, that miracle was specially designated to be shown to the Israelites; Pharaoh is not mentioned in reference to it. Another objection is that the Greek LXX renders both 4:3 and 7:9 as *drakon*, meaning dragon or (in later times) serpent.

Some critics made an issue of whether the rod is said to be Aaron's rod or Moses' rod, arguing that references to the rod as Aaron's are in sections by a different author from those referring to the rod as Moses' rod.³ Keil and Delitzsch correctly insist that there was only one rod.⁴ Aaron threw down the rod in 7:8, 10. The *same* rod was later used by Moses at the river's edge (7:15). Even there Aaron actually wielded the rod (7:19). Obviously the one rod was passed back and forth between Aaron and Moses.

11. *What means did Pharaoh use to belittle Moses' miracle? (7:11)*

He called in his wise men and sorcerers and magicians, who (seemingly) duplicated Moses' miracle. Pharaoh was NOT convinced that Moses' miracle proved that Moses had any powers that differed from those the Egyptian magicians and sorcerers possessed. Their performance confirmed his unbelief.

³Martin Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp. 71, 73.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the O.T.*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 475-476.

Back of Pharaoh's act lay a total unwillingness to accept any suggestion that he, Pharaoh, and the other gods of Egypt were not supreme. King Amenhotep II (probable Pharaoh of the exodus) entitled himself "the son of the sun god Re, . . . Amen-hotep-the-god-Ruler-of-Heliopolis, given life forever; the good god, likeness of Re," ⁵ To him Moses' miracle was a fifteen-cent stunt that was not about to make him relinquish his lofty views of his own omnipotence!

12. *How did Pharaoh's magicians duplicate the miracle?* (7:11-12)

In truth, we do not know. We only know that the effect produced was similar enough to Moses' miracle to satisfy Pharaoh. Davis ⁶ lists four suggestions as to how they may have done it:

(1) An optical illusion, produced in the minds of the viewers by Satan or evil spirits.

(2) Effective sleight-of-hand, possibly aided by Satan.

(3) Charming of serpents to become rigid like sticks. Some writers report that Egyptian magicians have been renowned for doing this. By pressing the nape of the neck, they partially paralyze the snake in such a way that they become stiff and unmovable, thus seeming to change them into rods. ⁷ (This would be MUCH more difficult if the rods were changed into crocodiles!)

(4) Supernatural feats, by demonic assistance, "lying wonders" (II Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13-14; Deut. 13:1-3). Such powers are real. We lean to this interpretation, since the text says they did their act by their "enchantments." Compare Rev. 16:14.

The great inferiority of the magicians' enchantments to Moses' powers was shown when Aaron's crocodile ate up the magicians' crocodiles. Their folly became obvious to all except the wilfully blind (II Tim. 3:8-9).

⁵From "The Asiatic Campaigning of Amenhotep II," translated by John A. Wilson, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), p. 245. Used by permission.

⁶*Op. cit.*, pp. 82-84.

⁷Jamison, Faussett, Brown, *Commentary on Old and New Testament*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), p. 295.

13. *Who were these magicians? (7:11-12)*

The apostle Paul gives their names as Jannes and Jambres (II Tim. 3:8), names also found in the Jerusalem Targum (a second-century A.D. Jewish writing).⁸ Magicians were very important in the bureaucracy of the ancient Egyptian government. They were a professional class, and held high government positions as advisers and diviners. Pharaoh called upon them to interpret his dreams (Gen. 44:8),

14. *Did Pharaoh function as God planned. (7:13)*

Exactly so! God had said Pharaoh would not hearken, and he didn't. According to the predicted plan of God, Pharaoh set himself up to become the victim of the signs and wonders (the ten plagues) that were now poised to strike his land.

15. *Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? (7:14, 3)*

The wording of 7:13-14 does not actually indicate whether Pharaoh hardened his own heart or God hardened it. However, the prediction in 7:3 indicates that God did it on this occasion. But do not forget that Pharaoh had already committed himself NOT to let Israel go (5:2). See notes on 4:21 ff. for a discussion about who hardened Pharaoh's heart.

16. *How do skeptical critics regard 7:14 ff?*

They regard it as the start of a different section, mostly by a tenth century B.C. author called J (for Jehovist, or Yahwist). The previous material (6:2—7:13) is attributed to a P (Priestly) author of the fifth century B.C. Some brief segments of 7:14—8:4 are attributed to P or to another source called E (Elohist). We simply cannot accept this theory (and that is all it is, a theory). It denies the Mosaic authorship of the book, something that Christ affirmed. Those who hold this view have many differences in their analyses as to which "source" certain segments are to be ascribed to (though they all deny it to Moses!). This lack of unity casts strong doubt on the whole system. In 7:15 we have a clear allusion back to 7:8-9. This supports the fact

⁸Alan Cole, *Exodus* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1973), p. 89.

that both sections are by the same author.

17. *Where did Moses go to encounter Pharaoh before the first plague? (7:15)*

To the Nile river brink. We gain the impression that Pharaoh went there regularly, perhaps every morning (8:20; Compare 2:15). We suppose it was an act of worship to the Nile, for the Egyptians honored the Nile as a god. They even had a Hymn to the Nile:

When the NILE floods, offering is made to thee,
oxen are sacrificed to thee, great oblations are made
to thee, birds are fattened for thee, lions are hunted for
thee in the desert, fire is provided for thee, and offering
is made to every (other) god, as is done for the Nile,
with prime incense, oxen, cattle, birds, and flame.⁹

Note the curiously antiquated wording "against he come" in the King James version of 7:15. A.S.V. gives "to meet him," and R.S.V. "to wait for him."

18. *What demand did Moses remind Pharaoh about? (7:16)*

The demand of God, that Pharaoh let Israel go out of his land, so Israel could serve Him in the wilderness (the desert of Sinai).

19. *What would the water-to-blood miracle make Pharaoh know? (7:17)*

That Jehovah was Jehovah (the Eternal one)! This idea is repeated so many times in Exodus that we need to pay special heed to it. See notes on 7:5; 6:2,6,7. Pharaoh had brazenly said, "I know not the Lord." He is about to get to know the Lord extremely well!

20. *Was the "blood" really blood? (7:17)*

Most commentators assume that any thick red fluid would correspond to the description of the river as "blood."¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch say that the changing of the water to blood was not a chemical change into real blood, but a change in color which caused it to assume the appearance of blood;

⁹From "Hymn to the Nile," translated by John A. Wilson, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), p. 373. Used by permission.

¹⁰Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

and that we should compare this miracle to Joel 3:4, where the moon is said to turn into "blood."¹¹

We are hardly willing to say that this "blood" was so exactly like body blood that it might have been used for transfusions. But we do not like the practice of assuming that we know a great deal more than what the scripture says. We assume that the river-blood was so much like body blood that it ought to be called "blood," just as the scripture speaks of it.

Many interpreters seek to explain this "miracle" as an unusual intensification of the annual pollution of the Nile at its lowest annual level, just before the spring rise begins in June.¹² At this time the river is stagnant and sometimes red as ochre from microscopic organisms. But the Nile river is not unhealthful to fish at that stage,¹³ as it became when Moses changed it.

Furthermore, if Moses' act of reddening the river were just the usual annual reddening of the Nile, why would it have had any effect on Pharaoh?

The liberal critic Martin Noth, while not accepting the literal truth of the plague stories, nevertheless says that the Nile-to-blood miracle is not a representation of regular annual Nile pollution, but is presented as a unique divine wonder.¹⁴ In this he speaks truth.

Others seek to explain the reddening of the river as being associated with some volcanic explosion.¹⁵ But this is mostly guesswork. These explanations also require us to believe

¹¹*Op. cit.*, p. 478.

¹²K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1966), p. 93. Gabriel Hebert, *When Israel Came Out of Egypt* (Richmond: John Knox, 1961), p. 69.

¹³Keil and Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁵Phythian-Adams, *The Call of Israel* (1934), pp. 137-72. *Reader's Digest*, Nov. 1967, has an article "The Explosion that Changed the World," which suggests that the explosion of the Greek island of Santorini about 1400 B.C. may have been a factor in causing the ten plagues in Egypt. The article admits that this theory stands on shaky ground.

some colossal coincidences occurred, such as that the volcanic eruptions occurred on the days just after Moses made predictions of disasters, and that the affected areas ended just where the Israelites began.

21. *What effects did the changed water produce? (7:18, 21)*

The fish died. The river *stank*. (That is exactly the meaning of the statement.) The water became loathesome and undrinkable. Such a pollution of the Nile would have had religious implications to thoughtful Egyptians.

22. *What places were affected by the change in the water? (7:19)*

The river branches of the Nile delta. The canals. (Canals had been dug all over the delta region for irrigation.) The pools (or reservoirs). And "in wood and stone."

The usual interpretation is that the "wood" and "stone" refer to *vessels* of wood and stone. Probably this is correct. Certainly the greatness of the miracle was demonstrated when water already in containers also changed to blood at the same time the river did. To us, it seems that the text says this very thing happened. Keil and Delitzsch say that this is NOT indicated by the text, but only that no more water was put into these vessels that was not changed to blood. This argument could be true only if several hours or days were required for the water to change to blood, allowing time for people to dip up water after the reddening started, but before all of it changed. The scripture does not really indicate any such time lag.

Some interpreters think that the "blood" so penetrated underground that trees and plants of "wood" picked it up with their roots, so that the plants would ooze red sap if plucked. There was blood in "stone," because the springs that flowed out from fissures in the stone ran with red liquid.

This explanation about the "wood" and "stone" seems unlikely to us, since apparently the Egyptians were able to obtain drinkable water by digging in the ground (7:24).

23. *Did Pharaoh himself witness the change? (7:20)*

Certainly he saw Moses and Aaron smite the water, and it appears that he saw the change occur. 7:23 indicates that

Pharaoh went to his house only after the water had changed and the magicians had performed their enchantments to change water to blood. Therefore, we assume Pharaoh saw the change occur.

The Nile river is a huge river. The delta of the Nile is nearly 150 miles wide and 125 long. The enormity of this miracle is staggering. "The blood was throughout all the land of Egypt."

It was powerfully appropriate that the first plague be directed at the Nile. Because the Nile affects all of Egypt, the plague got the attention of all Egypt. The Israelites would see God's power on a massive scale, and so would the Egyptians. It is still a picture of God's power to us.

24. *How did the magicians get into the act of changing water to blood? (7:22)*

We do not know. Maybe they were accompanying Pharaoh as he came out to the water. Maybe he summoned them, as he did before (7:11).

How were they able to change water to blood? Presumably by the same tricks or powers by which they changed rods to serpents (see notes on 7:11-12).

Where did they get water to change to blood if all water was almost immediately transformed by Moses? We suppose they got it from the water obtained by digging holes (7:24). The rabbi Ibn Ezra said they took rain [which is rare in Egypt], or they obtained water from Goshen, or they digged for it.¹⁶

One would think that the magicians would have shown more power (and certainly more usefulness!) if they could have changed the blood back to good water. But this they had no power to do.

Furthermore, the magicians probably only changed a few drops of water. Compared to Moses' massive miracle, this was nothing! But it was enough to satisfy Pharaoh. His wicked heart found all the justification he felt necessary in

¹⁶J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1969), p. 238.

the magicians' act. He now felt that Moses' miracle did not prove that he needed to change his thinking or his deeds. So he did not even consider it seriously, or lay it to his heart (7:23).

25. *Did the Israelites have good water?*

The scripture does not tell us definitely one way or the other. In later plagues a distinction between the treatment of the Israelites and of the Egyptians definitely occurred. No such differentiation is stated in 7:20-21, although that does not prove it did not occur. Josephus (in *Antiquities* II, xiv, 1) has an account that seems fanciful to us: "Such [bloody] was the river to the Egyptians, but it was sweet and fit for drinking to the Hebrews, and in no way different from what it naturally used to be."

26. *Did the Egyptians succeed in obtaining water by digging?* (7:24)

It appears that they did. Note that *all* the Egyptians dug round about the river. If the first few test holes that were dug had produced only the same blood that was in the river, surely digging would not have been employed on so wide a scale.

27. *To what period does the "seven days" of 7:25 refer?*

Probably it refers to the duration of the water-to-blood plague. Others suggest that it was the interval of time between the first and second plague (the frogs). We assume that after seven days the flow of fresh water from the upper Nile cleansed the river in lower Egypt (the delta). If this was the case, it is one more evidence that this change in the river water was not the usual annual discoloration, because that continues about twenty days.¹⁷

28. *How long a time-span did the plagues occupy?*

The last plague (death of the firstborn) occurred in March. The seventh plague (the hail, which beat down the flax and barley, but did not destroy the wheat) occurred sometime in

¹⁷F. C. Cook, editor, *The Bible Commentary*. Exodus-Ruth (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), p. 22.

January. The interval between January and March averages out to nearly three weeks between plagues. If we assume that the other plagues were approximately the same time apart, the whole series would have required about six months; and the first plague would have occurred during early autumn (Sept.-Oct.). This is admittedly mostly guesswork.

SPECIAL STUDY: THE TEN PLAGUES

I. *Facts about the Plagues:*

1. List of the plagues:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) River to blood. | (6) Boils. |
| (2) Frogs. | (7) Hail. |
| (3) Lice (gnats). | (8) Locusts. |
| (4) Flies. | (9) Darkness. |
| (5) Death of livestock. | (10) Death of firstborn. |

2. Meaning of the word *plague*:

A *plague* is not just a disease or epidemic, but any event or thing that afflicts, smites, troubles, or harasses.

The plagues are frequently called *signs* and *wonders*. See Ex. 7:3; 8:23; 10:1; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; Ps. 105:27. A *sign* is a miracle with a message. The plagues were to teach something, as well as to punish.

The plagues are also called *judgments*, a term which refers to punishments. (Ex. 6:4; 12:12)

The English word *plague* is a translation of several Hebrew words in Exodus. *Plague* in Ex. 9:14 (and Num. 14:37) is from *maggephah*, meaning a slaughter (as in I Sam. 4:17), or pestilential and fatal disorder. *Plague* in Ex. 11:1 is from *nega'*, meaning a blow, or stroke. *Plague* in Ex. 12:13 is from *negeph*, meaning a stumbling, or smiting, or plague. A verb form of this word is in Josh. 24:5.

II. *Purposes of the plagues:*

1. To force Pharaoh to let Israel go. Ex. 3:20: "I will put

forth my hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go." See also Ex. 7:4.

2. To show that God was the LORD, JEHOVAH. This was to be demonstrated both to the Egyptians (7:5, 17; 8:22; 9:14; 14:4, 18), and to the Israelites (6:7; 10:2; 15:11).
3. To show God's power. Ex. 9:16. The Egyptians would learn that the LORD was high above all gods (Ex. 9:14).
4. To *punish* Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their treatment of Israel. The word *judgments* in Ex. 6:6 carries the idea of punishments. "God cast upon them the fierceness of his anger" (Ps. 78:49-50). God made sport of the Egyptians and mocked them (Ex. 10:12).
5. To execute judgment upon the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4). Several of the gods of Egypt seem to have been specific targets of various plagues. See the following article and the notes on the various plagues.
6. To show that God made a *distinction* between His people Israel and those not His people. See 8:23; 11:7. One-half of the plagues are specifically said to have not touched the Israelites. Indeed, the Hebrews may have been exempt from all the plagues.
7. To cause God's name and fame to be spread abroad through the earth (Ex. 9:16; 10:2). Even today we still tell and retell the stories of God's acts in the plagues.
8. To produce fear in the surrounding nations that God would defeat them (Josh. 2:9-10; 9:9; I Sam. 4:8). The nations would learn that God would curse those who cursed the Israelites (Gen. 12:3).
9. To be signs to strengthen Israel's faith. The Israelites should have had courage to invade and conquer Canaan after they had seen what God did to the Egyptians (Deut. 7:18-19; Ps. 78:42-43).

Sadly, Israel did not understand the wonders in Egypt (Psalm 106:6-7, 21-22), and they soon forgot God's acts in Egypt.

10. To cause Israel (and us!) to keep the statutes of God

(Deut. 6:20-24).

11. To serve as *tests* (or temptations) to Israel (Deut. 4:33; 7:19). How would Israel respond to God's help? Would they have steadfast faith, or would they fail the test? Would the demonstrations of God's power in the plagues give Israel faith at other times when God did not choose to show His power so immediately and dramatically?

III. *Moral significance of the plagues.*

1. The plagues show God means business. We better do what He says.
2. The plagues show that God is certainly going to win in His conflict with Satan and with Satan's followers. Those who oppose God are going to lose and lose utterly.
3. The plagues show that God will surely PUNISH those who defy Him and refuse to receive His truth.
4. The plagues show that God will HARDEN those who set themselves to defy Him, and then punish them doubly. Other examples of this truth can be seen in the cases of (1) the Canaanites (Deut. 2:30); Hophni and Phinehas (I Sam. 2:25); (3) King Rehoboam (I Kings 12:15); King Amaziah (II Chron. 25:15-16); and (5) those who receive not the love of the truth (II Thess. 2:10-12).
5. The plagues show God's determination to keep His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. God was determined to bless Abraham and his descendants and give them the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:14; Psalm 105: 8-9, 27-36).
6. The plagues were types of Christ's victory over Satan. Moses was a type, or likeness, of Christ who was to come. At the outset of Moses' ministry, he defeated Pharaoh in the plagues. At the outset of Christ's ministry he defeated Satan's temptations in the wilderness. And finally Christ "despoiled the principalities and the powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (the cross)" (Col. 2:15).

We certainly agree with Bernard Ramm's statement

that unless there is a deeper typology in Exodus, the story is trivial. That which raises the story in Exodus above all other stories of struggle and survival in human history is its deeper typology. Ramm adds that it is at this point that Jewish commentaries and critical Protestant commentaries fail, because in both instances they fail to grasp the deeper struggle behind the events.¹ How true!

7. Since the experiences of the Israelites are examples, or types, of our spiritual experiences as Christians (I Cor. 10:11), the plagues appear to be illustrations of the way Christ will destroy all the enemies of His church. He shall smite the nations and rule them with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15).

Thus the plagues are types of God's subsequent judgments upon the nations. The plagues of Egypt resemble the seven last plagues of Rev. 15:5—16:21. Both involve sores, or boils (Rev. 16:2, 11), water to blood (Rev. 16:3-4), frogs (Rev. 16:13), and hail (Rev. 16:21). In both the plagues in Egypt and those described in Revelation, men are unwilling to repent (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21), even in the face of total ruination.

IV. *Arrangement of the ten plagues.*

1. The plagues grew generally more severe as they progressed. The plagues of the locusts and the darkness were particularly severe. The darkness was severe in that it exposed the greatest god of Egypt, its sun-god, Re, as being nothing. The plagues increased to a climax of terror at the death of Egypt's firstborn.
2. Commentators frequently have expressed the idea that the first nine plagues are grouped into three groups of three (1-2-3, 4-5-6, 7-8-9). We feel that this triple-triad arrangement is a man-made analysis, and is not really very significant. A case could be made for grouping the plagues into two groups of five, since plague number five (death of livestock) and plague ten (death of the

¹Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal, 1974), pp. 58-59.

firstborn) both involved death. Still these groupings seem accidental and unintentional. Certainly they were not obvious during the course of the plagues.

Nevertheless, we feel we should list here some of the reasons why many interpreters feel that the first nine plagues are arranged into three groups of three.

- a. Plagues one and two in each group (1-2, 4-5, 7-8) are announced to Pharaoh in advance, while the third plague of each group is inflicted without previous warning.
- b. The first series (1-2-3) was wrought with the rod of Aaron. No rod is mentioned in the second series (4-5-6). The rod is in the hand of Moses in the third series (7-8-9).
- c. In the second series a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians is mentioned. See 8:22; 9:4. However, this distinction is also mentioned in connection with plague seven (the hail; 9:26).

Keil and Delitzsch' commentary adopts the view that the three-fold grouping is real and noteworthy. However, they add the very necessary caution that this arrangement is NOT a merely external arrangement adopted by the writer for the sake of greater literary effect, but is in fact founded upon the facts themselves.²

V. Views held about the plagues.

1. Bible-believers regard the plagues as miracles. While the plagues involved familiar natural phenomena like frogs, lice, hail, locusts, etc., there were miraculous features about their coming and going.

Joseph Free lists five respects in which the plagues had a miraculous nature: 1. Intensification - frogs, insects, etc. were intensified far beyond any ordinary occurrence ever; 2. Prediction - the time of their appearance (like "tomorrow") and disappearance was predicted

²*Op. cit.*, p. 473.

before several plagues. Even modern weather forecasters cannot predict exactly when and where it will hail. 3. Discrimination - In the area where the Israelites lived, there were no flies (8:22), no hail (9:26), etc. 4. Orderliness - the severity of the plagues gradually increased. 5. Moral purpose - the plagues were not just freaks of nature, but carried a moral purpose in several ways.³

2. Other interpreters who are more skeptical view the ten plagues as purely natural events. They consider that the original events have grown larger and more marvelous as they have been told and retold. They feel that the plague stories are "derived from living oral tradition of the mighty acts of God."⁴ Of course, to hold such a view we must deny that Moses wrote down the record of events to which he was an eyewitness. Even more harmful is the presupposition lying behind these views, that God has never intervened in history by miraculous acts.

The interpreters who regard the plague stories as corrupted accounts of natural events do not agree among themselves as to what those natural events may have been. One Prof. Mahler thought that the plague of darkness was a total eclipse of the sun in 1335 B.C.⁵ Of course, 1335 is not the date of the exodus; and a solar eclipse lasts about three minutes, not three days. Others have thought that the plagues were effects of volcanic explosions, like those that blasted Mont Pelee in Martinique in 1902, or Krakatoa in the East Indies in 1883. Those produced terrific tidal waves, torrential rains, muddy cataracts of black and poisonous water, so that many fish died; and dark clouds of volcanic dust covered the sky.⁶ This explanation also is set forth as the

³Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History* (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1972), p. 95.

⁴Martin Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), p. 71.

⁵J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1969), p. 231.

⁶See "The Explosion that Changed the World," in *Reader's Digest*, Nov. 1967, pp. 122-127. Also W. J. Phythian-Adams, *The Call of Israel* (1934), 137-172.

explanation for the drying up of the Red Sea waters, the pillar of cloud and fire, and the descent of Jehovah in the cloud on Mt. Sinai.

The volcanic theory cannot explain how Moses could have predicted the coming and departure of these plagues at such precise times. Nor can it explain how the plagues were so selective about their victims. By common consent the theory is admitted to stand on shaky ground.

Others have thought that the plagues were only natural events in Egypt, which happened to an unusual degree. Sir Flinders Petrie wrote:

The order of the plagues was the natural order of such troubles on a lesser scale in the Egyptian seasons, The river turning to blood with the fish dying, was the unwholesome stagnant Nile just at the *lowest* [emphasis by author] before the inundations, when it is red and swarming with organisms. The Egyptians have to resort to wells and cisterns at this time, The frogs abound after the inundation has come in July. The plagues of insects, murrain and boils belong to the hot summer and damp unwholesome autumn. The hail and rain come in January. . . . The locusts come in the spring, over the green crops about February. The sandstorms bring a thick darkness that may be felt, in March. . . .⁷

The inadequacy of such an explanation may be perceived by suggestions by Greta Hort.⁸ She argues that the first nine plagues began with an unusually *high* [emphasis by the author] inundation, which may have brought microcosms known as flagellates, which would redden the river and kill the fish. Decomposing fish

⁷*Egypt and Israel* (1911), pp. 35-36.

⁸Quoted in K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1966), pp. 48-59.

drove the frogs ashore, having also infected them with *Bacillus Anthracis*. . . . The cattle disease of the fifth plague would be anthrax contracted from the dead frogs, etc.

For our part we place our faith in the record given in the Bible, and not in the contradictory guesswork of those without deep faith in God.

Jehovah Vs. THE GODS OF EGYPT*

The ten plagues were Jehovah's judgment against all the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4). All of the plagues showed the utter inability of Egypt's gods to protect the Egyptians. Several of the plagues appear to have been pointed directly against specific Egyptian gods. Here are some of the gods of Egypt which seem to have been special targets of specific plagues:



Hapi, god of the Nile. Sculpture at Kom Ombo temple, upper Egypt.

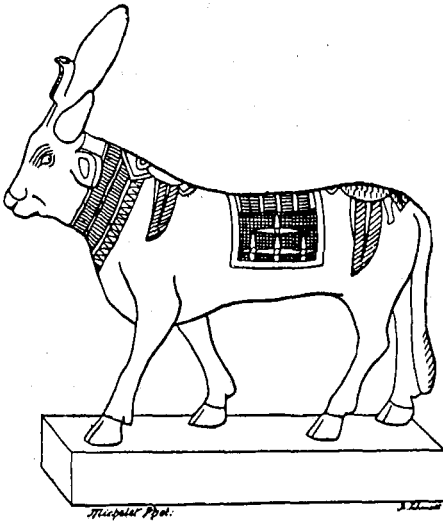


Hathor, cow goddess of love. Statue at Memphis.

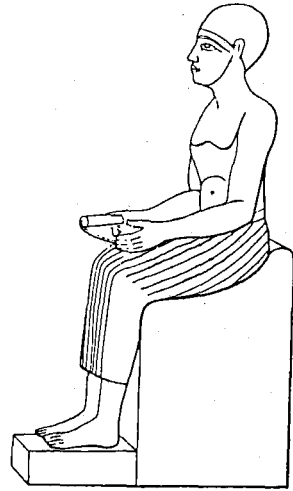
*The drawings of the gods of Egypt are from E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Dwellers on the Nile* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1888); and from E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Mummy* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1972). Used by permission.

Hapi, the god of the Nile, was often depicted as holding a table or altar on which are vases for libations, and lotus flowers, and fruits. He is thus represented as if he were presenting the rich products of the Nile's productivity. He was discredited in the first plague, when the river water turned to blood.

Apis, the sacred bull of Memphis, was called "the second life of Ptah," (the creator god). *Apis* was disgraced in the fifth plague, the murrain (or death) of cattle.



The Apis Bull.



I-em-hetep.

Hathor, the cow-headed goddess, was identified with the *sky*, and was the goddess of beauty, love and joy. She assisted the souls of the dead. The plagues of murrain of cattle and of hail discredited her.

Imhotep was originally an architect, wise-man, and chief ritualist in the Old Kingdom of Egypt. (In Egypt magic and medicine were inseparably related.) *Imhotep* became a demigod after his death, and eventually was deified as the god of medicine. But he couldn't prevent the plague of boils from scourging all Egyptians.

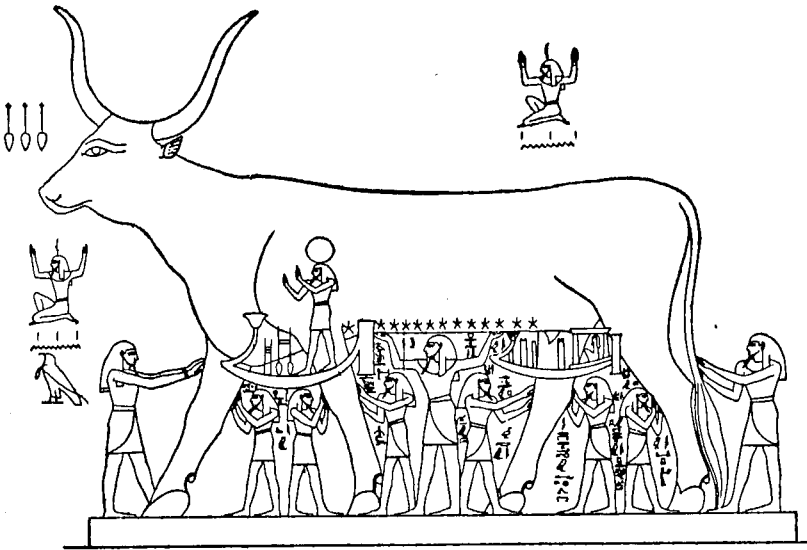


Amen-Rā



Rā

Two sun-gods of Egypt were discredited by the plague of darkness. *Amon* (or Amon-Ra), the city god of the capital city of Thebes, was a sun-god. To the Egyptians he was the **ONE** and **ONLY ONE**, the maker of gods, and lord of eternity. *Ra* (or Re) was the great sun-god. He was the great god of Heliopolis, the “city of the sun.” He was second only to Ptah, the chief god.



The Celestial Cow

Various divine beings support her limbs, while in the middle, *Shu*, the god of the atmosphere upholds her. (*Shu* couldn't prevent the plague of hail!) Along her belly, which forms the heavens, and bears the stars, moves the celestial boat of the sun-god, who wears the sun-disk on his head. Pictures like this one show that the plagues attacked Egyptian gods.*

* From J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (New York: Scribner's, 1924), p. 55.