



THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Exodus 9:1–10:29

Egypt's pharaoh was like so many people today. When everything he believed about religion, life, and the meaning of life was shattered by reality, he chose to cling to his prideful defiance of God rather than turn to God's Word, acknowledge His work, and seek His will.

If you're keeping score in this epic battle between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt, the score is four to zero, in favor of God. God is sending one plague after another, literally targeting the Egyptian gods in the process.

Now the fifth plague takes place, and it's aimed at the Egyptian god Apis. Apis is depicted as a black bull. The Egyptians believed that by worshiping him, their flocks and herds of cattle would be protected. One of the largest temples discovered in ancient Egypt was dedicated to the worship of Apis.

Here in Exodus chapter 9, God tells Moses to give Pharaoh this warning:

"If you refuse to let [my people] go and still hold them . . . the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field."

(verses 2-3)

Then verse 4:

"But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of

Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die."

In other words, He's saying, "Your god Apis doesn't protect your cattle; the God of Israel does."

And the next day, verse 6 says, "All the livestock [in the fields] of the Egyptians died." But just as God had promised, none of the livestock that belong to Israel, here in the land of Goshen, dies. And the Israelites are firing up their barbecue pits because Egyptian beef has just gone on sale.

We're told here in verse 7 that Pharaoh's heart is still



Depiction of Apis, the sacred bull



hardened. Remember, the word for “hardened” refers to twisting—like when you wring out a mop, what’s on the inside will come out. And Pharaoh’s inner defiance against God keeps spilling out.

Now God sends the sixth plague. And this one is going to reach into Egypt’s priesthood:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” (verses 8-9)

Then notice verse 11: “And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians.”

Now these magicians were priests. And Egyptian priests often would scatter ashes from their altars into the sky, believing this would bring blessing. So, this plague reveals the power of God over their superstition.

Also here in chapter 9, the seventh plague occurs, and it effectively targets the Egyptian sky goddess named Isis. The Egyptians believed that Isis placed a canopy of protection over them to guard their land against storms.

Well, look at verses 23-25

The LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.

The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.

I’ve been in some severe thunder and lightning storms but nothing like this. You could have gone bowling with these hailstones; they were large enough to shatter a forest of trees.

No wonder Pharaoh calls an emergency meeting with Moses and Aaron and says to them:

“This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the LORD for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go.” (verses 27-28)

In other words, “I’ve seen enough; our goddess Isis is nothing compared to the God of Israel.”

But wouldn’t you know it, as soon as the storm clouds clear up, Pharaoh changes his mind, and his heart is hardened. Like wringing out a dirty mop, filthy, defiant, sinful water again comes spilling out.

Now the eighth plague is described in chapter 10, as God destroys the remaining crops that are left standing. But you need to understand that what God is really doing is showing His power over the false gods of Egypt.

Let me tell you what is true to this day: without the God of Israel, you live in the darkness of unbelief.



The Egyptians worshiped a host of minor gods: the god of flax, the god of grain, a god that guarded the fields, and even a god that protected their crops from insects. In fact, they held an annual festival, where they exalted these gods. Some Bible scholars believe it was during this annual festival that God sent this eighth plague. ¹ I wouldn't be surprised at all.

In verses 3-6 Moses warns Pharaoh that if he won't let the Israelites go, locusts will sweep in and consume the remaining vegetation. And now, even Pharaoh's wise men are telling him to let the Israelites go. They have had enough. They even tell him in verse 7, "Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" He is so defiant that he refuses to recognize that his country is now bankrupt.

As promised, the next morning a swarm of locusts sweeps into Egypt. Verse 15 reads:

They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh turns on the crocodile tears again here in verse 16, but he has no intention of changing his mind. His emotions are affected, but his heart remains unrepentant.

Now with the ninth plague, God doesn't send Moses to warn Pharaoh. God simply sends a plague of darkness. And this plague strikes at Egypt's highest and most exalted god—the sun god Ra.

Verse 21 tells us God sends complete darkness—what we could call pitch-black darkness—three days without light. Beloved, this totally *destroys* the foundation

of Egyptian idolatry; it destroys any credibility Pharaoh has as offspring of the sun god. The sun god—Egypt's chief god—is turned out like a lightbulb, by the power of Israel's God.

Let me tell you what is true to this day: without the God of Israel, you live in the darkness of unbelief. The apostle Paul writes that without Christ we were at one time in darkness, but now, through Christ, we are in the light of the Lord (Ephesians 5:8).

Well, here is Pharaoh, a man who leads a bankrupt nation and a defeated host of false gods, and he says to Moses, "Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die" (verse 28).

And Moses responds prophetically, saying, "As you say! I will not see your face again!" And that's exactly what will happen.

To this day, Pharaoh represents all who defy the true and living God. Pharaoh illustrates here in living color someone who refuses to see the hand of God, refuses to listen to the word of God, and refuses to obey the will of God.

What about you today? Let me urge you to take a good look around and see, and relish, and savor the work of your creator God. Let me encourage you to listen to the Word of God and then obey the will of God. He is your life-giving, light-giving, gracious, faithful Lord.

What aspects of God's character do you see revealed in the plagues on Egypt?

Why do people resist the testimony and appeals of God even when the truth is evident? Do you see this tendency in your own life at times?

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Crossway, 2016), 299.

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