

Introduction

1. One of the things I've been challenged with recently is that we always refer to the 10 plagues of the Exodus, but it would be more accurate to refer to them as the 10 miraculous signs and wonders because that's what they really are—in fact, God calls them **“My signs and My wonders”** (Exodus 7:4)
2. Something that is revealed repeatedly throughout the Exodus narrative is that the purpose of these signs and wonders wasn't just to force Pharaoh to release Israel:
 - a. We find God's overarching purpose behind the plagues and His other acts throughout the Exodus in Deuteronomy 4:32-40 (READ)
 - b. Later in Deuteronomy 7:19 we learn that His mighty acts would also serve to inform Israel of what He could and would do to Israel's enemies
 - c. One final purpose of the plagues was to execute judgment upon all the gods of Egypt (READ Exodus 12:12; Numbers 33:4)
3. Egypt was a polytheistic nation with hundreds if not thousands of false gods and each of the plagues was directed at these gods and demonstrated God's superiority over them:
 - a. We saw this last week when the first sign before Pharaoh was Aaron's staff turning into a serpent and ultimately swallowing up the snakes of the magicians:
 - 1) Snakes were an extremely important religious symbol in Egypt
 - 2) The main snake god was Nehebkau and according to Egyptian mythology he swallowed seven cobras which gave him power against all forms of magic
 - 3) A second prominent snake god was the goddess Wadjet and she was most often depicted in what's referred to as the Uraeus—the upright Cobra worn on the forehead of pharaoh's symbolizing their sovereignty, authority and protection
 - 4) For Aaron's staff (snake) to swallow the magicians' snakes would have demonstrated superiority over all of Egypt's snake gods, and including Pharaoh himself
4. In our passage today, we come to the first of the 10 signs and wonders God orchestrated against Pharaoh and Egypt and it involved the Nile River:
 - a. The Nile River was critical in ancient Egypt because it was their main source of drinking water, irrigation for crops, protein (diet), and transportation
 - b. Except for the lush fertile land in the Nile Valley and northern Nile Delta up along the Mediterranean Sea, most of Egypt was a dry, harsh desert
 - c. Because of this, most of Egypt's population lived along the Nile and as a polytheistic people they deified the Nile with as many as a dozen of their gods connected in some way to the river
 - d. They believed these false gods were responsible for bringing life and fertility through the Nile, but in our passage today God brought judgment against not

only Pharaoh but these false gods, humiliating them by turning the Nile into a stinking, foul mess filled with blood and death

A. God warned Pharaoh of the CONSEQUENCES of his sin (7:14-18)

1. It's no surprise that this passage begins with a statement about the Pharaoh's refusal to let God's people go because back in 7:4 God already told Moses this would be the case:
 - a. V. 14 the NASB says the Pharaoh's heart was "**stubborn**" (NASB); other translations use words like "**hard**", "**unyielding**", even "**unresponsive**"
 - b. Throughout the plagues, there are at least 19 references in our English bibles to the Pharaoh's heart being hardened—usually in one of three ways:
 - 1) A general reference to Pharaoh's heart being hard/hardened
 - 2) The Pharaoh hardening his own heart
 - 3) Yahweh hardening Pharaoh's heart
 - c. There are three different Hebrew words used in these references, and each indicates something slightly different about Pharaoh's heart:
 - 1) One is qashah which refers to being hard or severe (Exodus 7:3)
 - 2) The second is chazaq which is the most common and it refers to strengthening something or making it firm—in other words, giving it a stubborn resolve (Exodus 7:13)
 - 3) The third is kabed which is the word for heavy and this is the word used here in v. 14:
 - a) A more literal translation would be "**heavy is the heart of Pharaoh**" and this was a declaration of sin and condemnation in the afterlife
 - b) The Egyptians believed in something called the 42 Negative Confessions (Declarations of Innocence) as part of their preparation for the afterlife
 - c) When Pharaoh's were embalmed, all their organs except the heart were removed because in the afterlife their hearts would be weighed against the feather of Ma-at, the goddess of truth, justice, and order
 - d) Someone who sinned a lot in life would have a heavy heart so after death the Pharaoh would appear before a council of gods and the 42 negative confessions would be used to determine if his heart was heavy with sin and weighed more than the feather
 - e) If it did, it spelled doom for the Pharaoh in the afterlife
 - 4) So when God declared "**heavy is the heart of Pharaoh**" Moses and the Israelites would have understood this to be a declaration of Pharaoh's sin, guilt, and condemnation in the afterlife
2. In verses 15-18 God gave Moses a message for Pharaoh spelling out the consequences for his sin:

- a. V. 15 says Moses was to deliver this message at the banks of the Nile with Aaron's staff in his hand (READ):
 - 1) The text doesn't tell us why Pharaoh was going down to the river and scholars suggest a plethora of reasons:
 - a) My personal opinion is that he was going down to bathe or ritually cleanse himself because we see something similar in 8:20 (SEE)
 - b) Whatever the reason God had Moses meet him there because of what He was about to do involved the Nile
 - 2) Moses was to take Aaron's staff because it served as a symbol of divine authority and power (it was used in the first few signs and then afterwards in the wilderness as a symbol of authority)
 - b. In v. 16 God lays out his charge against Pharaoh (READ):
 - 1) This references back to Moses's first visit with Pharaoh (READ 5:1-5)
 - 2) Pharaoh did not listen (i.e. did not obey)
 - c. In v. 17-18 God declared the consequences for Pharaoh's sin (READ):
3. Something we must not overlook is the purpose for what God was about to do:
- a. It wasn't just to punish Pharaoh or an act of revenge
 - b. Rather we find the real purpose in 17: **"By this you will know that I am Yahweh..."**
 - c. God repeats this refrain over a dozen times in Exodus in relation to Pharaoh, all of Egypt, and Israel, but more is intended than simply acknowledging His existence
 - d. Passages like Exodus 9:29-30 make it clear that knowing that He is Yahweh implies fearing Him (READ)
4. Takeaway: There are consequences for sin, but they are not without purpose; they reveal who God is and should cause us to revere Him with a healthy fear (READ Hebrews 12:4-11)

B. God demonstrated His sovereign CONTROL over the gods of the Nile (READ 7:19-21)

- 1. This was catastrophic:
 - a. With the exception of the Nile Valley and Northern Delta, Egypt was a desert so most of Egypt's population lived in the Valley and Northern Delta
 - b. Not only was the Nile their main source of drinking water and irrigation, but it also provided their main source of protein in their diet, fish
 - c. All of this was impacted—no drinking water, no irrigation, no fish

2. It's become popular in recent decades for many scholars to suggest that God used natural phenomena to accomplish the plagues and that He didn't turn the Nile into literal blood:
 - a. Some suggest that God simply caused water from the mountains to wash reddish clay and silt down into the Nile
 - b. Others suggest the water turned red from a specific type of algae which also starved the water of oxygen causing the fish to die and water to stink
 - c. However, this doesn't fit the context:
 - 1) The impression given in the text is that the change in the Nile occurred simultaneously with Aaron stretching out his rod and striking the water, not over the days or weeks required by some natural phenomena
 - 2) It wasn't just the water in the Nile that turned to blood, but all the streams, pools, reservoirs and even water that had been previously drawn from the Nile but was now stored in wooden and stone vessels
 - 3) It also begs the question, since God's purpose was to convince Pharaoh and all of Egypt that He was the all-powerful Yahweh, how would some naturally occurring phenomena do that?
 - d. The bottom line is there's no reason in this context to deny that God literally turned the Nile into blood just as the text says

3. What is ultimately happening here is a demonstration of God's sovereignty over Pharaoh and His superiority over the false gods of Egypt:
 - a. As I stated in the introduction, the Egyptians had over a dozen gods they associated with the Nile—they were thought to be the Nile's source and the ones who controlled every aspect of the river:
 - 1) Osiris: the Nile was considered to be his blood stream; main god of fertility, vegetation, and agriculture;
 - 2) Hapi: main Nile deity; thought to preside over the annual flooding
 - 3) Hhnum: considered to be the source of the Nile
 - b. By turning all of the Nile and the water associated with it into blood, God not only humiliated the Pharaoh and these false gods but showed them to be inferior to Him

4. Takeaway: There is only One True God and He's a jealous God who demands that we worship no other—this is so important it's not only one of the Big Ten but #1: **“You shall have no other gods before me.”**

C. Yahweh allowed the COUNTERFEIT works of the magicians to harden Pharaoh's heart even further (7:22-23)

1. I refer to the works of the magicians as counterfeit because I don't believe they supernaturally turned water into blood like God had done:

- a. The text says “**they did the same with their secret arts**” but the phrase “secret arts” is simply the plural form of secrecy
 - b. This same phrase is used three other times of the magicians—with the snakes (7:11), with the frogs (8:7) and with the gnats (8:18) when they were unable to mimic what God had done
 - c. This implies they had no supernatural power but were simply using slight of hand or illusions much like magicians today
 - d. Plus, if they truly could do supernatural acts, why didn’t they reverse what God had done and turn the blood back into water?
2. These counterfeit acts resulted in the Pharaoh’s heart being hardened even more just as God had predicted:
 - a. The word translated “**hardened**” is the Hebrew word chazaq which at its root means to strengthen, make strong or firm
 - b. I suggested earlier that in the case of Pharaoh; it likely refers to a stubborn resolve which is defined as a fixed or determined commitment to a course of action that refuses to bend no matter the challenge or consequences
 - c. This certainly describes Pharaoh’s actions here as the text says “**he did not listen**” (22) and simply “**turned and went into his house, and he did not set his heart even on this**” (23)
 3. Takeaway: there are all kinds of counterfeits in this world—new age practices, emotional experiences, false teachers, unbiblical doctrines, even demonic practices—and they are all designed to deceive us and harden our hearts (READ Philippians 4:8-9)

D. Yahweh exercised COMPASSION in the midst of His judgment (READ 7:24-25)
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1. In the midst of this supernatural judgment, we see a glimpse of God’s compassion:
 - a. The first is that He didn’t completely eliminate their ability to find drinking water—they were able to dig around the Nile (likely shallow wells) to find water
 - b. The second is that the plague only appears to have lasted a week—the text says “**seven full days passed after Yahweh had struck the Nile**” (lit. “seven days were fulfilled”) and most interpret this as the duration of the plague
2. Takeaway: God’s judgment is often accompanied by mercy and compassion—the two greatest examples of this are the Flood (where He didn’t wipe out all of humanity) and the Cross (where He provides salvation despite no one deserving it)