

Lesson 53

God Displays His Power

God showed his power before Pharaoh through the plagues.

Overview

Lesson Focus

God sent plagues on Pharaoh and his people for refusing to let the Israelites go. Each plague demonstrated God's power over the false gods of Egypt. Pharaoh's magicians were no match for the true God.

Key Passages

Exodus 7:2–5, 7:10–13, 7:19–23, 8:6–7, 8:16–19, 10:21–23

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh's magicians.

Describe how God demonstrated his power through the plagues.

Memory Verse

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

Moses and Aaron delivered God's message to Pharaoh: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1). Pharaoh responded, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). And so the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh—really, God versus false gods—began. This first encounter between Moses and Pharaoh would prove to be one of many. God continually hardened Pharaoh's heart as Pharaoh refused to release God's people (Exodus 7:13). Pharaoh's initial reaction to this first of many requests from Moses was to increase the hardships and labor of the Hebrew slaves (Exodus 5:6–14).

God's people immediately began to question his plan for them by complaining to Moses (Exodus 5:20–21). When Moses questioned God, God reminded Moses first of who he is, "I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:2, 6:8) and then of the covenant he had made with his people to give them the land of Canaan (Exodus 6:4–5). He is faithful, he is powerful, and he will accomplish what he has promised.

But God's plan included more. It included miraculous signs beginning with Aaron's staff (Exodus 7:8–12) and continuing through the plagues brought upon Egypt because of Pharaoh's hardened heart (Exodus 7:13–10:29). Through all of the nine plagues, Pharaoh did not relent to release the Israelites (Exodus 10:27). Several times he agreed but then tried to dictate the terms of where (in Egypt rather than three days' journey away), who (just the men), and what (not the animals) they could take. God refused these attempts of Pharaoh to control the situation. God demanded full obedience to his terms, and the results for Egypt were devastating. The people lost drinking water, animals, crops, servants, their health, and more because of Pharaoh's stubbornness. To make a distinction between his people, the Israelites, and the Egyptians, God supernaturally protected the Israelites from the plague of flies, death of livestock, boils, hail, and darkness.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Egyptian history can be traced back to Mizraim (translated as Egypt in the ESV), Noah's grandson, who settled there around 2150 BC after the dispersion at Babel (Genesis 11). In fact, the Hebrew word for Egypt is Mitsrayim, which is also translated as Mizraim (Genesis 10:6, 10:13). The present name for the country of Egypt is Misr, derived from the name Mizraim—the one who founded Egypt. Shortly after Mizraim established this first Egyptian dynasty, Egypt began pagan worship, inventing multiple false gods. The plagues the Lord sent upon Egypt before the Exodus were judgments against the many false gods Egypt had devised to replace the one true God (Numbers 33:1–4), as shown below:

Plague	Egyptian god
1 Nile turned to blood	Hapi, god of the Nile River
2 Frogs	Heket, goddess of fertility, having a frog's head
3 Gnats or Lice	Geb and Akhor, gods of the earth
4 Flies	Khepri, god of creation, having a fly's head
5 Death of livestock	Hathor, the mother cow goddess
6 Boils	Isis, goddess of medicine
7 Hail	Nut, goddess of the sky
8 Locusts	Seth, god of vegetation
9 Darkness	Ra, god of the sun
10 Death of the firstborn Pharaoh himself, held to be a god	

In this account, God revealed that he alone is God (Isaiah 46:9), he is to be feared (Joshua 24:14), and he is faithful to his promises (Exodus 13:11).

You may hear some try to explain miracles—especially those performed in Exodus—with naturalistic explanations. However, we know from Scripture that each of the plagues was predicted by God through Moses and Aaron before it occurred. They were obviously miraculous deeds performed by a holy God. Some of the “natural” arguments surrounding the plagues include the following:

The Nile River turned red due to a species of red algae mixed with red dirt. This combination washed into the river and made it appear as blood.

This alleged red algae produced an anthrax virus that moved downstream, killing the fish and causing the frogs to escape into the cities and countryside.

A volcanic eruption in Santorini, Greece, caused ash to taint the Nile and provoked the subsequent plagues, the ninth plague of darkness resulting from volcanic ash in the atmosphere.

In many cases, it takes more creativity, imagination, and faith to believe some of the theories people will contrive in order to discredit God's Word than it takes to believe the Bible. We know, however, that human minds cannot comprehend the nature and depth of God, for his message seems foolish to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18).

We believe that the Bible is the final authority—the infallible and inerrant Word of God. We don't need naturalistic explanations for the amazing things our Creator God has accomplished, whether it be the plagues of Egypt, a floating axe head (2 Kings 6:5–7), the sun standing still (Joshua 10:13–14), Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:25–26), or the resurrection of our Savior from the tomb (Matthew 28:6). We accept the Bible as the Word of the all-knowing and all-powerful Creator, who is fully able to perform supernatural wonders to accomplish his will and reveal his glory.

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