

Purpose of Plagues

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1. Exodus 3:19-20 [Let them go!]

(19) Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might. (20) So I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt with various wonders which I will work upon them; after that he shall let you go.

2. Exodus 4:23 [Revenge/Punishment – see Midrashim of “measure for measure”]

I have said to you, “Let My son go, that he may worship Me,” yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son.”

3. Genesis 15:14

(14) but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth.

4. Exodus 5:2-5 [Education about G-d]

But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.” They answered, “The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He strike us with pestilence or sword.” But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you distract the people from their tasks? Get to your labors!” And Pharaoh continued, “The people of the land are already so numerous, and you would have them cease from their labors!”

5. Exodus 12:12 [Battle the gods of Egypt – Developed by Cassuto]

(12) For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the LORD.

6. Exodus 7:17

(17) Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD.” See, I shall strike the water in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it will be turned into blood;

7. Rashi ibid based on Tanchuma

Because rain does not fall in Egypt but the Nile rises and irrigates the land and the Egyptians on this account worshipped the Nile, therefore God first smote their deity and afterwards smote them.

8. Targum Jonathan on Exodus 12:12

(12) And I will be revealed in the land of Mizraim in the majesty of My glory this night, and with Me ninety thousand myriads of destroying angels; and I will slay all the firstborn in the land of Mizraim, of man and of beast, and against all the idols of the Mizraee I will execute four judgments: the molten idols shall be melted, the idols of stone be broken, the idols of clay shall be shattered, and the idols of wood be made dust, that the Mizraee may know that I am the Lord.

9. Tur HaAroch, Exodus 12:12:1

Nachmanides therefore proposes the following: mention of the deities of the Egyptians refers to the respective representatives at the heavenly throne of the people of Egypt, their *mazzal*.

10. Rashbam on Exodus 12:12:1

... because the Egyptians had put their trust in these deities; G'd had to demonstrate their utter helplessness to help themselves, much less those who worshipped them. It was an indirect response to Pharaoh's insolence in asking “Who is Hashem, etc.?” (5,2)

11. Was There an Exodus: Joshua Berman, <http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2015/03/was-there-an-exodus/>

Comparative method can yield dazzling results, adding dimensions of understanding to passages that once seemed either unclear or self-evident and unexceptional. As an example, consider the familiar biblical refrain that God took Israel out of Egypt “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.” The Bible could have employed that phrase to describe a whole host of divine acts on Israel's behalf, and yet the phrase is used *only* with reference to the exodus. This is no accident. In much of Egyptian royal literature, the phrase “mighty hand” is a synonym for the pharaoh, and many

of the pharaoh's actions are said to be performed through his "mighty hand" or his "outstretched arm." ...

12. The Ten Plagues, Norman Fredman, Tradition 20 (4), 1984

The Ten Plagues had begun with God not accepted in the Egyptian pantheon. They end the same way-because now that pantheon is no more. And now Egypt is ready to be punished for killing God's firstborn son.

13. Philo, On the Life of Moses I, XVI-XVII; XXIV:134

XVII. For the elements of the universe, earth, water, air, and fire, of which the world was made, were all by the command of God, brought into a state of hostility against them, so that the country of those impious men was destroyed, in order to exhibit the height of the authority which God wielded...

After which the tenth and last punishment came, exceeding in terror all that had gone before, namely, the death of the Egyptians themselves. Not of them all, for God had not decreed to make the whole country desolate, but only to correct it. Nor even of the greatest number of the men and women of every age all together, but he permitted the rest to live, and only passed sentence of death on all the first-born, beginning with the eldest of the king's sons, and ceasing with the first-born son of the most obscure grinder at the mill.

14. Ziony Zevit's, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues" *Bible Review*, June 1990.

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/exodus/exodus-in-the-bible-and-the-egyptian-plagues/>

[A]ccording to this suggestion, the plague of blood (No. 1) was directed against the god Khnum, creator of water and life; or against Hapi, the Nile god; or against Osiris, whose bloodstream was the Nile. Frogs (No.2) was directed against Heket, a goddess of childbirth who was represented as a frog. The pestilence against cattle (No. 5) might have been directed against Hathor, the mother and sky goddess, represented in the form of a cow; or against Apis, symbol of fertility represented as a bull. Hail (No. 7) and locusts (No. 8) were, according to this explanation, directed against Seth, who manifests himself in wind and storms; and/or against Isis, goddess of life, who grinds, spins flax and weaves cloth; or against Min, who was worshiped as a god of fertility and vegetation and as a protector of crops. Min is an especially likely candidate for these two plagues because the notations in Exodus 9:31 indicate that the first plague came as the flax and barley were about to be harvested, but before the wheat and spelt had matured. A widely celebrated "Coming out of Min" was celebrated in Egypt at the beginning of the harvest.¹⁰ These plagues, in effect, devastated Min's coming-out party. Darkness (No. 9), pursuing this line of interpretation, could have been directed against various deities associated with the sun—Amon-Re, Aten, Atum or Horus. Finally, the death of the firstborn (No. 10) was directed against the patron deity of Pharaoh, and the judge of the dead, Osiris.

Additional data from Egyptian religious texts clarifies the terrifying tenth plague. The famous "Cannibal Hymn," carved in the Old Kingdom pyramid of Unas at Saqqara, about 2300 B.C.E., states: "It is the king who will be judged with Him-whose-name-is-hidden on that day of slaying the first born." ... [He notes that not all can be explain this way...]

15. John Currid, Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament 108-113 [found <http://bit.ly/2lplwJN>]

The opening disaster (Exod. 7:15–25) was clearly directed against the Nile River, which in its inundation was deified and personified as the Egyptian god **Hapi**.... And, indeed, Egyptian writings spoke of **Hapi** as the one who kept Egypt alive. A major consequence of the Nile's turning to blood was the death of the fish, a staple of the Egyptian diet. The people were unable to eat or drink from the river. **The river and its god could no longer supply** the people's needs....

The second plague (Exod. 8:1–6) also appears to be a contest between deities. The Egyptians regarded the **frog** as a symbol of divine power and a representation of fertility. One of the main goddesses of Egypt was **Hekhet**, who was depicted as a human female with a frog's head. She was the spouse of the creator-god Khnum. He fashioned human bodies on his potter's wheel, and then **Hekhet** blew the breath of life into them and assisted as midwife at their births. **Hekhet** also had the responsibility to control the multiplication of frogs in ancient Egypt by protecting the frog-eating crocodiles. But [G-d] overwhelmed **Hekhet** and caused her to be impotent in her task...

The catastrophe of the hail was a mockery of the **Egyptian heavenly deities**, including **Nut** (the female representative of the sky and personification of the vault of heaven), **Shu** (the supporter of the heavens who holds up the sky), and **Tefnut** (the goddess of moisture)...

The final plague was primarily directed against **Pharaoh as a god of Egypt** and against the Pharaonic succession...Mockery of Egyptian polytheism found expression in other ways in the Exodus narrative. Exodus 11:7, for example, states that during the final plague "against any of the sons of Israel **a dog shall not even sharpen** its tongue... An arguable point is that the author is making a subtle reference here to the **impotence of Anubis, the god of the dead** and embalming. Anubis, who had **a canine form**, had no power of life or death over the Israelites, who were protected by [G-d]

16. JJ Davis, Studies in Exodus: Moses and the Gods of Egypt, page 148-149.

The firstborn of Pharaoh was not only his successor to the throne, but by the act of the gods was a specially-born son having divine property.